

**On the Shores of Education:  
Urban Bodies, Architectural Repetitions, and the Mythic Space of End Times**

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## ABSTRACT

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Education is a space of contestation. It is not that we fight over who should occupy it, be occupied by it, and how—although we do that as well. What can we say about education that won't be contested? Rather, the space of education is a real and imagined place through which we think contestation itself, learn to enact it as regulated struggle. The more difficult challenge is to recognize the mythic structure of education that we agree to disagree over. More difficult, because its function hides in plain sight, a blinding or banal sun, a toe-hold polished slick by our practiced slipping. The story of education is a story of forgetting: it is the story we tell ourselves in order to remember to forget. It is not that the story does not spin off in so many contested directions, become things that elude these formulations. It does. It is that these variations weave around a deep mythological structure that orients this spinning struggle itself.

We can, surprisingly, be quite precise.

The distinctive mythic structure of education emerges coextensively with urban formations. Drawing on earlier myths of sacrifice, woven around themes of birth and death, education quickly becomes a privileged way in which the city articulates itself, reaching its formal articulation quite early on with Plato. Plato's allegory of the cave—serving as one of the most enduring touchstones of educational imagery—will serve as our object, orienting a study

that proposes to examine—to borrow the excellent, minimal formulation of the novelist Haruki Murakami—*what we talk about when we talk about education*.<sup>1</sup> Finding ourselves talking about education, what is it that we are talking about? If Plato’s cave allegory will serve to orient us to this question, it will not do so in the traditional manner of an object of inquiry or an example, as if it would illuminate the nature of our discourse, but rather as something that we will approach and recede from as a kind of inverted obelisk, a black hole in the earth itself by which to navigate. In that sense, we take our cue from the allegory itself: to the extent that we talk about education, we talk of confines and horizons, of pathways and turnings, of leading and being led, of light and darkness, and we do so as a journey that unfolds. It is a story of being on the way, but more precisely a story of waiting, of being blinded, unable to go on, unable to return; a story of verges and endless deferrals. When we talk, *we talk of where we are and where we might be going*, and we do so as if it were something else, the whole of which eludes us.

It could be argued whether Plato’s allegory is the primary formulation through which this mythic structure permeates the discourse of education up to the present day, or whether the myth is passed on through more varied historic mechanisms—this allegory thus being a momentary articulation of a larger structural articulation that sweeps it up and carries it forward. However, this is precisely the uncertain moment of education itself. Setting out we will discover ourselves disoriented, perplexed by our surroundings, unable to arrive straight away at our object. Instead we will notice several aspects of how we talk about education: we tend to draw on a whole topology of spaces oriented around images of the city on the shores of

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<sup>1</sup> Haruki Murakami, *What I talk about when I talk about running : a memoir* (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008).



the sea, of stories of sacrifice and ascent, of heroism and mindlessness. Without being sure what to make of these (are they shadowy distractions or blinding truths?) we will simply note their recurrence. They return, as if to haunt our discourse. When we talk about education we seem to talk about cataclysms and hellish spaces below the city—even when we seem to be leaving them behind for good.

With this repetition, we can begin to approach the allegory closer, noticing that, rather than being a story told *ex nihilo*, it repeats earlier stories that the city told itself about itself. In particular we see that the discourse constituted around the city of Athens draws on mythic, geographic, historic, and social accounts that play on a common structure of journeys of downgoing and emergence. In particular we see—both in the mythology surrounding the birth of Athena and in the pre-Socratic beginnings of a philosophical discourse—a way of talking that begins to appear eerily familiar. Having set sail and approached the city of Athens, we will ascend the path to the Acropolis, if only to then find ourselves deep in Plato's cave. Following along as closely as we can, we will see if we can glean something about what we do when we tell this particular story. In particular, as a way of understanding the strategy at stake, we will keep an ear out for other resonances that are opened up by the sense of repetitions. For example, we will see that for a city, to descend often involved a journey out to another city, before navigating the labyrinth beneath it. The Athenians had their particular version, but a tuned ear will begin to pick up echoes from even earlier narratives told in Mesopotamia. When we talk about education we frequently talk, it would seem, of going out and down, of sacrifice and emergence. Upon closer examination, these epic, mythic structures—far from simply being narrative embellishments or abstractions—drive many of our everyday practices of education. If learning involves escaping from hellish caverns, then in order to enact the

ritualized journey we must ensure not just a metaphoric parallel but a practical one. The modern classroom, with its ritualized practices, is a constructed space that allows us to repeat this narrative. Likewise, the urban practices that instantiate and preserve inner cities and other zones become the backdrop for a discourse on Urban Education, asking teachers to journey out and down, so that they can do the work of education. Is Education the answer to these imbalances, or in order to enact the perpetual rituals of education do we ensure that the scene is properly set? *No Child Left Behind*, and *Race to the Top*, are not just examples of political rhetoric, although they are that. This rhetoric, nevertheless, is also tied to very specific practices by which we enact education. So what we talk about when we talk about education—while seeming to exist in the virtual space that we have created prior to emergence into “the real world,” metaphorically—is in fact inextricable from what we do with ourselves when we do education. It is tied to the physical layout of the classroom, to the school’s presence within a topography and flow of a place and communities, but also to flows of capital as well as political rhetoric, and to the practices of testing, measurement, and assessment that accompany them. These practices, seemingly the opposite of a mythology, are perhaps best understood as the modern, bureaucratic equivalent of the labyrinth, through which we regulate journeys that allow us to make sense of what it means to live together, to be a city.

We conclude then, by pausing to reflect on the (re)emergence of the discourse of “occupation.” When we talk *these days*, we talk about percentages and occupations, of violence and community, of finding homes in public spaces or being ousted from private spaces. Two questions pose themselves. First, what is emerging now that might challenge our sense of the repetitions of these narratives, hinting that we cannot allow the discourse “the city tells itself about itself” in education to wash over us so confidently? If Education is a story of being on the

move, what does it mean to pause and resist, perhaps trying to make a home on the path, or in the park, itself? What urgency is there in attempting to come to grips with whether or not the repetitions really can come full circle, whether the stories we tell ourselves will not leave us this time, whether we will be eaten by the Minotaur? The second, related, question is to what extent even this discourse draws from the history of repetitions, of horrors barely averted, or cataclysmic collapses from which we emerge by the thinnest of threads, only to be reborn. If we are witness to something new, we should perhaps reckon with how old it is as well, lest we forget a long history of resistance and occupation.

Lest, that is, we forget that Education has always, when we talk about it, been the ambiguous moment when we find ourselves either struggling to open a gap in the relentless cycle, or striving mightily to ensure that we can close it against the storm, averting catastrophe.

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# Acknowledging

The first word is not one's own to give. We discover this. It comes to be known, [Acknow: ON + know] but belatedly, somewhere down the line, and we find ourselves compelled. To confess, to reveal, to thank, to record, or to correct the record. To start again properly. Rightside up.

Above all, to acknowledge is to reflect back on this inversion in which we discover that it is the other way around: it is the "I" itself that has run alongside this larger conversation, a haunting epiphenomenon taking cryptic notes. In looking back, I must acknowledge a webbed history of voices in which I found myself surrounded, weaving across time, of which the work to follow is but one, ridiculous, frayed, illusory thread. But not just voices. (Words, words, words. One does not thank a voice.) What I found is people, fellow bodies, touching gestures, actions and stillnesses, a labyrinth of places, corridors, strangers, comrades. And I discover that they keep coming. Memory engenders memory; encounter engenders encounter. A whole exquisite history of debts.

In reflecting back, I must acknowledge gratefully the impossibility of it being otherwise. *These people, these places.* I would like to say something, unbearably brief, of them. Or rather, to them.

The College of Mount Saint Vincent, *Graduate Program in Urban and Multicultural Education*, where, overlooking the Hudson, I learned to situate education: To Lizzette Zayas,



from whom I learned the *passion* and *fight* in teaching, I would like to say simply, “co-teachers, *siempre*.” To Ron Scapp, who dared to put me in the classroom, and gave me room to do my thing, whatever that turns out to have been: I blame you for that terrible mistake and encouragement. To the hundreds of in-service New York City school teachers and administrators who had no idea what they were in for by showing up in my classes, words fail me. I can only think that what we were doing together was a kind of acknowledgment. Recognition. But of what? That teaching is being with people? You taught me that it matters how things go, that you had just come from and were returning to a class of your own, and that a philosopher better have some *thoughts*. Thoughts *that move*. I feel you out there. You are in every word of this dissertation. Do your thing.

Teachers College, Columbia University, *Program in Philosophy and Education*: a place for beautiful misfits of education if ever there was one. David Hansen, you embodied the cosmopolitan before any of us knew what to call it. In welcoming *first*, you held a space open for so many to see what may emerge. John Baldacchino, who when I spoke of philosophy, education and *cities*, was already ahead of me, and artfully; I look forward to more such “escapades.” John Broughton, for sharing your interest in the (in)comparable, cf., this movement between cultural formations: it is a pleasure. Olga Hubbard, I owe you a debt of thanks for connections and resonances, and for entertaining all of the awkward words grasping at the tangible—school asks us to talk more than we ought, but what so reassures me is the *making* that never disappears from hands, eyes, spirit, once they touch upon the inexplicable. This *other* language. Megan Laverty, for whom I will continue to struggle for and

with words, since I have never known a more attentive, more care-ful *hearer*: thank you for traveling and conversing with me. My life is the better for it.

To those who shared in this journey in ways too interwoven, too inextricable to even pretend to tease out, Paula Kadanoff, Sheryl Field, Nancy-Laurel Pettersen (who else, in addition to everything else, could proofread something that won't stay still?), Ravi Ahmad, April Bradley, Kristin Hatleberg, and Polina Porras Sivolobova: one could not set out with better company to revolve around this sun, to live. Blake Seidenshaw and Ethan Jucovy, kindred spirits, for whom navigating, making, and encoding are not so distinct: I feel lucky, and we have yet to begin. Helen Miller and Joshua Hart, dearest friends, and my colleagues in *Aesthetic Relational Exercises*: what an intense joy it is to allow relationships to be drawn out together. We too are only getting started.

Fellow cave dwellers, shoulders brushing, talking of shadows—Socrates underestimates the value of these *bonds*: Cara Furman, Ariana Stokas, Michael Schapira, David Backer, Cristina Cammarano, Carmen James, Dino Anderson, Timothy Ignaffo, Gonzalo Obelleiro, Dror Post, Avi Mintz, Jeff Frank, Terri Wilson, Darryl De Marzio, Allison Faye, Pollyanna Rhee, Courtney Zehnder, Monica Barra, Victoria Natanas, Alexa Kokinos, Winnie Jamieson, Michel and Natasha Alhadeff-Jones...

Can we go further back in the cave? To my first Philosophy teacher, in High School, Greg Coleman, who thought to ask why I flew, and knew enough not to buy the answer; to Bruce Foltz, a philosopher's philosopher; to Alphonso Lingis, compassionate spaceman; to an adjunct writing professor, name long forgotten, who was more interested in playing with the

impossible than with “teaching”: we pass through your sphere for a moment and move on, but not without profound gravitational effect.

And finally, to my family—my mother and father who showed us a way of living, Erica and Colin and Natalie, Olivia and Adelaide who have much to teach us—it is, in a word, a *pleasure*.

*For my first teacher,  
Patricia Moffett*

## Epigraph

Anterior posteriorly: separation is not thus “known”; it is thus produced. Memory is precisely the accomplishment of this ontological structure: A marsh wave that returns to wash the strand beneath the line it left, a spasm of time conditions remembrance.

—Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*

Remember those Attic stelae, how amazed you were at the caution  
of human gestures; at the way love and parting were  
laid so lightly on their shoulders, as if made of other stuff  
than in our lives? And their hands, how they touched  
without pressure, even though such power resides in the torsos.  
Those self-mastered ones knew: we can go *this* far;  
this much belongs to us, to touch each other *thus*; the gods  
can grip us more forcefully. The choice is theirs.

—Rainer Maria Rilke, *Duino Elegies*

## A Preface on Method

They want to put metaphysics in motion, in action. They want to make it act, and make it carry out immediate acts. It is not enough, therefore, for them to propose a new representation of movement; representation is already mediation. Rather, it is a question of...making movement itself a work, without interposition; of substituting direct signs for mediate representation; of inventing vibrations, rotations, whirlings, gravitations, dances or leaps which directly touch the mind.

—Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*.<sup>2</sup>

### Two Jokes, more or less...

We should begin with two jokes. For good measure. The first is a joke about *starting what you have finished*, and it is a classic...

But to get to it, let us slip in (by way of) a meta-joke, a joke about jokes:

Two boys invite a new boy to their secret tree house. The two boys have been telling each other the same jokes so long that they have, for economy, given them numbers. One of them slaps his leg and shouts out “4” causing his friend to burst out laughing, while the newcomer laughs awkwardly along. “13” the other rejoins when he has caught his breath. The newcomer again follows along, perplexed but eager to be a part of the fun. This goes on for some time, until the newcomer feels like he’s getting the hang of it. “23” he chimes in, whereupon the two friends freeze, looking at him with hurt expressions. “Hey, that’s not even funny,” the one says.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and repetition* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 8.

<sup>3</sup> We see a similar function played out in a skit from the British sketch series, *That Mitchell and Webb Look*, called “Numberwang,” in which a game show is reduced to a formal series of numbers. Without any observable coherence, what is highlighted is the procedure itself: the

What is it about jokes? We follow along so that we can get bounced out. We look to get bounced out so that we can be bound together. The art of the joke, hinging on the unexpected, must be immanently recognizable in form and content. “Two guys walk into a bar...”<sup>4</sup> All of which is to say, a classic joke is one that we can call out by the numbers and still find funny; or rather, can still make use of the memory that it was funny. So to tell the (now preempted, displaced, or *prefaced*) first joke in the sequence we might just slap our thigh and exclaim: “The Preface to Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit*.”

That’s the first joke. Joke #1. The second joke, then, goes something like this... Just kidding. We should elaborate, being more inclusive with this first joke. Only everyone knows that you can’t explain a joke. Either it worked or it didn’t, and to explain is to drive it even further into the ground.<sup>5</sup>

So let us have Derrida do the explaining of the joke of Hegel’s Preface to *The Phenomenology of Spirit*: “This preface to a philosophical text thus explains to us that, for a philosophical text as such, a preface is neither useful *nor even possible*.”<sup>6</sup> [Emphasis added.] The concept, as it works itself out through philosophy, leaves no remainder, no outside from which one could view the whole. And yet. The Preface. It is as if this is precisely the role of the preface: to pre-clude itself, and after the fact. To shout out, “the remainder is 0.” And yet, even

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game of being in it together (and out of which the loser will be ejected.) Emulating the formal ritual of game and joke, is itself the joke. *That Mitchell and Webb Look - Numberwang*, (2006).

<sup>4</sup> The punchline to the meta-joke version of this is, of course: “ouch, ouch.” To which we could riposte, “knock, knock.”

<sup>5</sup> Unless you are a professional, perhaps, and then you know that working a bad joke is enough to build a career around: Johnny Carson, Steve Martin’s the arrow-through-the-head-gag, Rodney Dangerfield... We could go on with this listing of jokes, enumerating and laughing away. And yet. The Preface. We must begin.

<sup>6</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination* (Chicago: University Press, 1981), 9.

still, The Preface. We must contend with the remainder of the exclamation of the null set itself, as if in the end—the preface being written, of course, after the fact—the joke was on Philosophical discourse itself. (“Hey, that’s not even funny.”)

Derrida persists:

But if something were to remain of the prolegomenon once inscribed and interwoven, something that would not allow itself to be sublated [relevé] in the course of the philosophical presentation, would that something necessarily take the form of that which falls away [la tombé]? And what about such a fall? Couldn’t it be read otherwise than as the excrement of philosophical essentiality—not in order to sublimate it back into the latter, of course, but in order to learn to take it differently into account?<sup>7</sup>

We shall have to return to these themes, but we are already getting dangerously close to escaping our preface, brushing too close to the edge of the work to come: of learning and falling; of tombs even, or graves; of interweaving and excrement. Let us not spoil the joke. We must respect the formal structure of the preface—the *impossible* empty protocol.

On to the second joke, then:

A duke was hunting in the forest with his coterie of men-at-arms and servants, when he came across a tree with an arrow protruding, dead center, from a target painted on it. Marveling at the nice shot, they ride on. Before long they come on another tree, with another target, and again, an arrow dead center. Eventually they see another, and another, until it seems like every tree in the forest has been painted with a target, each one pierced with unerring accuracy. Riding on in astonishment, they eventually come across a small boy, carrying a bow and a nearly empty quiver. Pressed, the boy eventually admits to being responsible for this incredible display of marksmanship. The duke suspiciously demands, “You didn’t just walk up to these targets and place the arrow in the middle, did you?” “No, my lord, I shot them from a hundred paces. I swear it.” “That is remarkable,” said the duke. “I hereby admit you into my service as a master archer. I just ask one favor in return: you must tell me how you managed to become such an amazing shot.”

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 10.



“Sure,” said the boy, happy to oblige. “It’s really easy. First I shoot the arrow, then I take my paintbrush...”

This, of course, only works as a joke. Told straight, it is the lament of modern education: either it is the sham of modern testing, in which the results can be manipulated to show whatever is convenient, or it is the critique of “kids these days” lazily gaming the system. *In my day we had to earn an A.*

As a joke, however, it deflates our dukish concern with displays of skill. Slipping past the suspicious defenses, it exposes the hidden gullibility of desire, and it does so by painting a circle around the more essential truth: that the proliferation of targets was meaningless to begin with. It takes a child to see the fun in running around, painting targets after the fact. The slogan of exhausted parents and teachers everywhere: “do what I say, not what I do.” That is: will you just say it, and then act like you mean it? Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, suggest that this is the primary function of language; speaking is a particular form of (not) doing:

Language is made not to be believed but to be obeyed, and to compel obedience. “The baroness has not the slightest intention of convincing me of her sincerity; she is simply indicating that she prefers to see me pretend to agree.” We see this in police or government announcements, which often have little plausibility or truthfulness, but say very clearly what should be observed or retained. The indifference to any kind of credibility exhibited by these announcements often verges on provocation. This is proof that the issue lies elsewhere. Let people say...: that is all language demands.<sup>8</sup>

If it is true that we see this operation displayed in policing and governance, we should consider what it means that the place in which it is perhaps most overt is in schooling itself. Indeed, this

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<sup>8</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A thousand plateaus: capitalism and schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 76.

is the scene—the school, rarely evoked elsewhere by them—through which Deleuze and Guattari begin to articulate their postulates on linguistics:

When the schoolmistress instructs her students on a rule of grammar or arithmetic, she is not informing them, any more than she is informing herself when she questions a student. She does not so much instruct as “insign,” give orders or commands. A teacher’s commands are not external or additional to what he or she teaches us. They do not flow from primary significations or result from information: an order always and already concerns prior orders, which is why ordering is redundancy.<sup>9</sup>

The child-archer’s *modus operandi*: do what you do, and don’t hesitate to say it. The pleasure of the joke is in that the child lets fly as casually with his tongue as with his arrows. Happy to obey, he paradoxically refuses to be obedient, to play along. The joke ends here, of course; paints its target and absconds. The forest is the scene of evasion, and the court is caught out of its element.

This is the inversion: the Duke, appearing to be in command, tests the boy only to find that the boy, not bothering to aim, thus can’t help but test and hit upon the Royal weakness. This is the ambiguity of arrows. On the one hand it is a question of character: what kind of person are you? This is the role of the arrow in Ulysses’ return home—to differentiate him from all of the improper suitors. Only Ulysses will be able to pull the bow well enough to thread the twelve rings. The arrow as indicator of true nobility amidst corruption. This is also the story of Robin Hood and the Golden Arrow—the bow and arrow is the proper way to split hairs. Only the truly noble will master the skill; the rest are pretenders or pedants, in either case unfit for rule. In this sense, education always involves learning to shoot, and we are always getting schooled by arrows.

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 75-6.

The true scholar, then, must be able to point accurately, to tell the real difference, ferret out the critical distinction. And yet, it is the object set in ballistic motion, unable to turn, that winds up indicating the backwardness of things. This is why arrows are so often funny. We should not be surprised, then, to recall one of philosophy's classic jokes. One of Zeno's more famous paradoxes was that of the arrow in flight. Defending Parmenides, who argued that the world was not made up of multiplicity but was one, Zeno takes up an unusual strategy. Instead of proving this to be the case, he sought to demonstrate the absurdity, make a joke, of the opposite claim. If we imagine a world in which time and space are infinitely divided, then an arrow in flight, at any instant, must be immobile. *Absurd. Ergo, all is one.* If the arrow is the litmus test of noble truth, its precision is in refusing the division, closing the gap of time and space, the trappings of nobility itself. The role of the arrow is to pierce the illusion of utterances and obedience, to show that there was always only one. The illusion was to imagine that things were divided. Falseness is not one more thing; it is nothing.

This was the aim of the popular book, *Zen in the Art of Archery*: the realization that we are no different than the target. It is in the act that we discover the falseness of our designations, our speaking. Thus war or sport are not the opposite of contemplation but its completion in the act. Deleuze writes, in *The Logic of Sense*:

The sage is like the archer. However, this connection with the archer should not be understood as a moral metaphor of intention, as Plutarch suggests, by saying that the stoic sage is supposed to do everything, for the sake of attaining the end.... The relation to the archer is closer to Zen: the bowman must reach the point where the aim is also not the aim, that is to say, the bowman himself; where the arrow flies over its straight line while creating its own target; where

the surface of the target is also the line and the point, the bowman, the shooting of the arrow, and what is shot at.<sup>10</sup>

We should, perhaps, see the simple act of the child-archer in this vein. He was merely painting what was already the case. What is left? Everything is to be spent in the shot. (In the forest wealth is stripped and redistributed, or pending redistribution, keeping nothing in reserve.) From Zeno to Hegel, this is the joke: there was never anything left. But if everything is one, we should be careful not to mistake this for the logic of identity. Above all, what we learn from the child is that there is never just one arrow—the final test. Instead identity is reduced to absurdity through the proliferation of arrows and targets. A “hail” of arrows.

What we always seem to manage to get wrong is putting this proliferation back in the service of noble identity. In Asian epic cinema today—say in *Hero*—the hail of arrows always seems to go from the ordered and infinite imperial force towards the singular heroic target; while in Western tales, the arrows blotting out the sun tends to go from multitude to multitude, raining down on the ranks, the very sign of randomness. Who will fall? Which crack in the shields will be found? An arm, a leg. A game of fate. The hero is the one taking his chances like anyone else, while of course surviving for the true showdown when one shot will finish it. The hero is not surrounded; the hero emerges.<sup>11</sup>

Somehow we get from the wisdom of the child, proliferating arrows and deflating Dukes, back to arrows as singular tests. Perhaps the joke is recuperated, absorbed. Or we wind

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<sup>10</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *The logic of sense*, European perspectives (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 146.

<sup>11</sup> This would be the latest film adaptation of Robin Hood, by Ridley Scott, for example.

up with a waiting game, interminable truces and vexations. Schooling. We learn to wait.<sup>12</sup> It may even be that jokes rely on, or even play on this (e.g., The endless improvised joke with an intentionally lame punchline.)<sup>13</sup> A child, thrilled at tricking an adult, tries again to surprise them, but too soon, and has to learn to hide their plan to try again. Or, unable to distinguish themselves, Guildenstern and Rosencrantz, in Tom Stoppard's play, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*, try to unravel the cruel joke being played on them as minor characters in a drama that seems to be on rails.

*Enter HAMLET behind, crossing the stage, reading a book—as he is about to disappear*

*GUIL notices him.*

GUIL (sharply): Rosencrantz!

ROS (jumps): What!

*HAMLET goes. Triumph dawns on them, they smile.*

GUIL: There! How was that?

ROS: Clever!

GUIL: Natural?

ROS: Instinctive.

[...]

ROS: Now I'll try you—Guil—!

GUIL: —Not yet—catch me unawares.

ROS: Right.

*They separate. Pause. Aside to GUIL.*

Ready?

GUIL (explodes): Don't be stupid.

ROS: Sorry.

*Pause.*

GUIL (snaps): Guildenstern!

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<sup>12</sup> See for example: T. E. Moffitt et al., "A gradient of childhood self-control predicts health, wealth, and public safety.," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Science, USA* 108, no. 7 (2011). "Self-control"—as if it could be reduced to marshmallows—simply indicates here a capacity for delayed gratification.

<sup>13</sup> Here we should modify, add to, or jest about the account given by Freud's quotation of Lipps, "A joke says what it has to say, not always in a few words, but in *too few* words—that is, in words that are insufficient by a strict logic or by common modes of thought and speech. It may even actually say what it has to say by not saying it." It is not just that a joke may avoid saying what it has to say, but that such an avoidance is essential. But not *too soon* either. Even in the quickest witticism one has to wait for it. It is precisely not the *amount* of words, but the differential created by deferral and surprise. One says both more and less. The unsaid is the unsayable itself, the gap between setup and punchline. Sigmund Freud, *Jokes and their relation to the unconscious* (New York: Norton, 1989), 7.

ROS: (jumps): What?  
*He is immediately crestfallen, GUIL is disgusted.*<sup>14</sup>

Can one surprise oneself being natural? Unable to settle in, they attempt to leverage a minimal difference, (to at least know which of them is which) and fail, falling back. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern will discover all too well, however, that leaving, setting out from Denmark, is no escape either. The sea voyage is accompanied by a letter that will reel them back in and seal their fate. Likewise, if schooling is either a funny enough joke or for many a terminal bore or worse, it is nevertheless never simply a question of leaving it behind. On the one hand there is the Scylla and Charybdis of either deferred rewards for the interested (themselves, statistically, all too often something of a cruel joke<sup>15</sup>), or a whole apparatus of pressures and coercions to not be a “dropout.” But on the other hand, even when you leave you have not left, continuing to be situated in relationship to the schooling you have left. Education absorbs the very narrative of flight itself. (As we will see, it is one of the primary functions of educational narratives to elaborate the escape trajectory itself.) We can only begin to speculate on the implications of this, but at the very least, from a methodological standpoint we should note that this will complicate any gesture of critique in relationship to this narrative of flight, if only for two reasons. One, where would one stand in order to leverage such a critique? And two, even if the critique is successful it runs the risk of simply replicating the very gesture of escape that we have learned from education itself. We may even contemplate that we play at

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<sup>14</sup> Tom Stoppard, *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern are dead* (New York,: Grove Press, 1967), 44-5.

<sup>15</sup> Ira Shor, for example, will talk of the process of “cooling out” in which the student learns that it is their own inadequacy or behavior that is the cause of the discrepancy between the implicit and explicit promises that lured them back to school and the institution’s structural inability to supply it. Ira Shor, *Critical teaching and everyday life* (Boston: South End Press, 1980).

critique, at finding cracks to slip through, as a way of distracting ourselves. From what? The repetitions themselves?

*Another* joke comes to mind. (We can begin to see how jokes fly, repeat, call for and exceed enumeration.) Have you heard the one about the farmer who refuses to lend his neighbor a rope because, he claims, “he is using it to tie up his milk?” The neighbor points out how absurd that is, to which the farmer responds, “Maybe, but if I don’t want to lend you the rope, one excuse is as good as another.”

The joke, of course, is that you aren’t supposed to say that to the person’s face. It is *de rigueur* to at least come up with a reasonable sounding excuse. But it is as if we, to the extent that we are the farmer, hardly want to be bothered. In this sense, pointing out the absurdity of logic changes nothing. Whether we are using our rigor to tie up milk or not hardly matters; what we prefer is not to have to come up with a good use for it. In that case, the real joke is not that we have said the unsayable at the expense of the neighbor, showing competition to trump reason. The joke is instead that the neighbor is our excuse for why we rigorously tie up our milk. The neighbor is expendable, but as a necessary expense to cover up the absurdity that the tying of milk is essential.

Rigor is merely *de rigueur*—a question of etiquette and protocol. Or is it more difficult than that? Is it the call for rigor that is operative, in opposition to any rigor actually achieved? We must keep ourselves busy. In this case, the most radical proposition would be that we don’t even want to keep ahead of the world; we just want to not have to think about what we are doing in the name of education. Paradoxically, we ask not that the student/neighbor *believe* us, but that they agree anyway. The rope coils on itself, and must be decoupled from any reasonable object. The more unreasonable the proffered object, the better. Only we should step

carefully here: it is not that one should go out of one's way to find an object that is unreasonable—that is, to offend one's neighbor. (We will return to this misunderstanding shortly.) Reason, rather is a function of the coiling itself. The object's "unreasonableness" is merely its indifference to the procedure. Any number of procedures will suffice, even the establishment of a subject area and its essential content, a textbook, a protocol, a test.

This is perhaps the difficulty of beginning with jokes. It can become difficult to discern where the jokes stop. But can we sidestep them? It is here, in the tension between rigor and laughter, that we begin to feel out our methodology, and also perhaps begin to acquaint ourselves with our materials: repetition and surprise, inclusion/exclusion, prefaces and the complication of order, an attunement to remainders, arrows, the making of circles, coils and their absurd objects. Let us see if we can begin to put them into play.

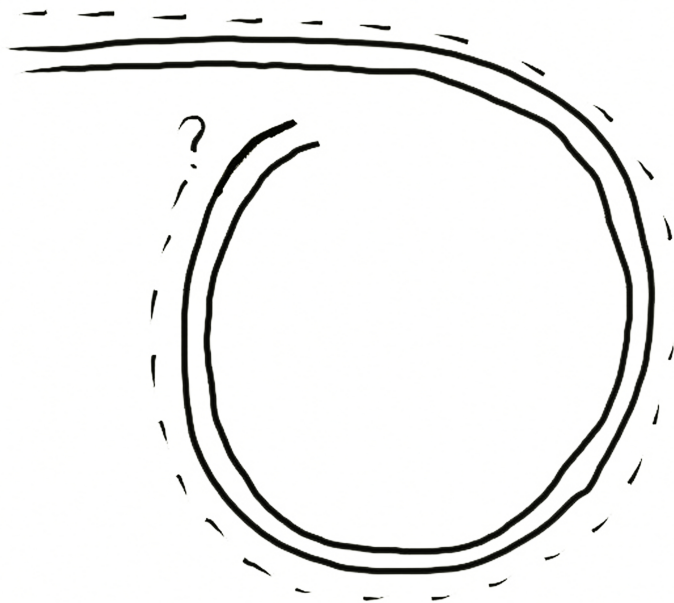


Figure 2: Two jokes and a metajoke, philosophical concepts and a preface, two boys and an initiate, coils of rope and a neighbor, concentric rings on a target...



## Wrappings, Rope Tricks, and Fidelity

Let us say—for argument’s sake—that we have formulated a thesis. (But where would it reside, this thesis in advance of itself?) We could even say such a thesis goes something like this:

*Education “as a field” is marked not so much by a field as by a particular narrative structure of moving through a space, generating a progressive function—the edification of ascent and clarity, or the leisure to perform the work of inquiry itself—while articulating and simultaneously dissimulating its opposite, regressive function. To be repeatable we must measure each ascent in relation to a correlative descent, while appearing to be decoupled.*

Fair enough. Education is a (repeatable) wonder. We should not get ahead of ourselves though. We establish a starting place. In time, it will prove grounded or not by the successive examples that we marshal and work through, each building on the line of the previous. And each time, the question is of coherence: can we find our mark and start again? Having coiled around several times, we are in a position to conclude, taking time perhaps to acknowledge the gap that remains as a result of the extra rope. A reader may choose to follow this back down and around the coils, finding a kind of wiggle room through the previous argument that might allow it to go differently, or fit more comfortably. Or it can serve as an indicator of further coiling to be done. The two are, in fact, not mutually exclusive but serve as twin indicators of professional readiness.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Or “professional cleverness,” we might say; professionalism being one of the modes by which we wrap ourselves up as a way of generating a differential of intelligence and propriety. Take for example Freud’s unintentionally revealing choice for an exemplary “condensation” joke—a joke that works by way of abbreviation. Let us in turn be brief in running through it: A holder of “one of the highest offices of state,” upon the mention of a red-haired author of a series of boring essays, remarks, ‘Is not that the *roter Fadian* that runs through the story of the Napoleonids?’ Red hair, of course, lends itself to caricature, and the cruelty is applied by way of the addition of *Fadian*, a “dull fellow.” But a *roter Faden* is

The skilled cowhand knows to keep extra rope available to loosen a turn, and knows that if they need more rope they can send a ripple down the existing tension to free it up, recoil, and send a loop flying again. Ariadne gives a ball of thread to Theseus who unravels it, laying it down along the line of his route, so that he can follow back along his steps without going astray.

“Ariadne’s Thread,” we might also note, is a term in logic, illuminating the debt of logic to myth, but more specifically to a spatial operation, a *practice* of logic. “It refers to a particular mode of running through a problem, often exhaustively. The critical factor is the inclusion of a “thread,” the creation of a record “physical or otherwise” that permits backtracking, reversals and alternative forays. The thread serves to simplify the implementation of logical operations, which can simply be performed sequentially and randomly from the available courses of action. If an impasse (a logical contradiction) is reached, retrace the thread to the last choice, mark the previous entrance, and choose again... This is distinct from “Trial and Error” as a

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a “red thread,” famously turned into a simile, by Goethe, for the affection running through the diary of Ottilie. A *roter Faden* is woven into each and every rope in the English Navy, running its whole length in such a way that it cannot be extricated, thus marking the rope as belonging to the crown. What is most illuminating about this invective in disguise is the way in which Freud will himself attempt to untangle it, breaking it into several different linguistic threads to show how they run alongside one another, even generating a visual chart of the parallel (implied) variations. The condensed joke is the rapid weaving of all of them at once, as a way of establishing, shall we say for brevity, *The King’s Navy*. Indeed, Freud will later point out that a joke can be an outlet for hostile aggression, using this example. The high position of the teller does not allow him the freedom to insult the person directly, and so he plays at being a schoolboy or a commoner, who would stoop to making fun of red-hair. This is the professional cleverness, or the cleverness that *establishes a differential of professionalism* in the very act of transgressing it: “And now Herr N. has made it possible in the most ingenious manner for us, grown-up and sensitive people, to laugh like the schoolboys at the historian X’s red hair.” Freud, *Jokes and their relation to the unconscious*, 123. Freud’s misstep is simply to think that this is a clever guise by a man of stature—the true content being his finding a writer boring—rather than seeing this as the very gesture, devoid of any content, that instantiates and plays across these positions. The joke, we could say, makes the man. The red thread simply runs along peripherally, adding no structure, and yet its role is not even to deter theft, but to establish a Navy.

formal operation, which suggests that one learns as one goes. The thread replaces a trial with a *recording loop/track*.

Here as well, in both the mythological and logistical operations, we see the expendability of the object, its systematic rejection. The thread is accompanied by a sword. The monstrous object that necessitated being wrapped in a labyrinth is, for the follower of threads, a threat that must be confronted and slain. The thread follows the wraps of the labyrinth itself, inserted into the gap, and followed back to its uncertain, unreasonable, monstrous *raison d'être*.

Or, Penelope, weaving a burial shroud, opens up a new line of time, unraveling by night the work that she has done by day, picking it up and repeating it again, thus deferring the pending closure of marriage until it can be with the one who will thread the straight line of rings, with an arrow for a shuttle. And yet even this feat of linearity is set up by multiple unravelings. Ulysses, arriving under cover of his threadbare beggar's garb, was never far from his reputation: the man of many turns.<sup>17</sup>

Trickery is never far from fidelity. It is never a question, as it would seem, of proceeding in proper order, of doing first things first, of being above board. The idea, for example, that one should write the preface last is a commonplace. The "proper order" is out of order; the end abuts the beginning. And if one is commended to set out with a proper thesis, it is also common knowledge that this is merely the articulation of the coiling one chooses to make visible *after* all of the uncertain circling about. Nor is it a question of simply opening or

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<sup>17</sup> See for example: Michael Naas, *Turning: from persuasion to philosophy: a reading of Homer's Iliad* (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press, 1995). Naas argues for a notion of persuasion that amounted to a turning force, a turning towards presence, tracing the twists and turns through the well-turned Ulysses of Homer's *Iliad*.

closing the gap. The devil lies in the timing; in what slips through, or out. Penelope is found out, the secret escaped, her repetitions leaked. But they have also held open a gap long enough for Ulysses to return. It is in then extending the repetitions forward to their culmination in the finished work that the purported work of mourning will be brought to a close.

There is thus an ambiguity that lays down alongside the procedural coilings, indeed that allow them to work in the first place. It is true enough to say of Plato (and of the long line of educational coils that have followed suit since) as Deleuze does: “The one problem which recurs throughout Plato’s philosophy is the problem of measuring rivals and selecting claimants....It is a dangerous trial without thread and without net, for according to the ancient custom of myth and epic, false claimants must die.”<sup>18</sup> True *enough*, though, because we are not surprised to find it unravel, to find a whole network of threads underlying a Greek bravado. To cite Plato’s evocation of myth at the very moments in which he desires to install *logos* over *mythos*, is to simply indicate that you are well situated within contemporary repetitions, a savvy reader. (We know that the illusion of a trial without a thread is itself a thread, indebted to a long line of mythological stories of threads coming to an end.) It, nevertheless, is still to say nothing of what it means to follow this mythic thread.<sup>19</sup> Even the notion of the trial between claimants finds us inextricably caught, opening up as much as it ties off, leaves us hanging. Deleuze continues: “However, in what exactly, does the grounding test consist? Myth

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<sup>18</sup> Deleuze, *Difference and repetition*, 60.

<sup>19</sup> And it perhaps above all inoculates the professional philosopher from the challenge of recovering *mythos* from Plato’s gesture itself, treating *mythos* itself as an abstract type. This is precisely the Platonic move: Socrates never tells a myth without decoupling and preparing it first. Indeed “recovering” is itself reflective of that gesture, as if myths were to be dusted off, preserved, or put to proper use, extracted from the usages in which they emerged.

tells us that it always involves a further task to be performed, an enigma to be resolved. The oracle is questioned, but the oracle's response is itself a problem."<sup>20</sup>

### **This Stranger is You: Caricature, Writing, and the About Face**

We tie things up and put a bow on them. But what is a bow but the symbolic offering of an opening—the way back in, a decorative proliferation at the end of the binding, a slipknot?<sup>21</sup>

Does the oracular response ask us to unwrap it, or is it wrapped in order to become oracular? A child learns early on that they can get their father a tie, any tie, and that will suffice as long as one wraps it with care, as if the tie were the reminder of this secret pact or bond.<sup>22</sup> It is the wrapping that establishes the memory, the proper order, but also installs an ambiguity in the heart of the gesture itself. What is it that we really want?

*Desire in general*, we could follow Hegel, is self-consciousness. But turning inward what it discovers is a void, a negation, uncovering Desire's essential need for the recognition of another. But having picked up this thread of Hegelian desire, let us reel it back in, to the entrance itself. Hegel, finding his way out of the preface and into the work, begins the *Phenomenology* proper by wrapping certainty itself. "Our approach to the object must also be *immediate* or *receptive*; we must alter nothing in the object as it presents itself."<sup>23</sup> And yet the

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<sup>20</sup> Deleuze, *Difference and repetition*, 63.

<sup>21</sup> Symbolic, of course, even in the most banal of senses: our bows today are stick -on, the way in elsewhere, the gift itself exchangeable. But was it ever otherwise?

<sup>22</sup> We routinely prepare children for this, walk them through it. If a child gives a father what they *truly* want—what, a sexy new car, a sense of security?—this is the turning point, an act of aggression: "You are no longer able to be the father; no longer can you collect another tie."

<sup>23</sup> Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Phenomenology of spirit*, trans. Arnold V. Miller (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 58.

object is presumed to minimally speak: “All that it says about what it knows is just that it is.”<sup>24</sup>

Is it sense certainty that utters this, or is it what we mouth for it? Already we have claims and uncertain claimants. Fittingly, Hegel proposes a test:

To the question: ‘what is Now?’, let us answer, e.g. ‘Now is Night.’ In order to test the truth of this sense-certainty a simple experiment will suffice. We *write down* this truth; a truth cannot lose anything by being written down, any more than it can lose anything through our *preserving* it [Emphasis mine].<sup>25</sup>

No doubt Hegel was proposing something of an exercise, and we would proceed in bad faith if we were to call it to speak for itself so soon, to parody its awkwardness. But does this not show the difficulty of *starting out*? As if, in the very moment when the preface—preconception itself—must be let go we find not the immediate, but its caricature, not an actual test, but the simulation of a test, an “educational test” we could say. We may have come to expect already the doublings, the sensible made to speak and then written down, a record that will run alongside the moment, a procedure of preservation. (Still it is puzzling: whence this writing hand patiently waiting for the rising sun?)<sup>26</sup> But what might capture our attention, what is perhaps truly noteworthy, worth writing down alongside this *writing on writing*, is the mock innocence. ‘Ah, the Night, e.g.! How unexpected!’ This will not be the last time the sun finds itself distinctly absent in the writing to come, but was it the first time either? Do we need this *faux* written test to tell us that we have seen the sun rise and fall before? Is sense-certainty being asked to play dumb, or is it us? Every student, whether they can fill in the blank with an

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 60.

<sup>26</sup> Is it that this test emerges out of sense-certainty itself, as its desire to know itself, as if it somehow gleaned a split in time? This does little to comfort. Turning it around, all that can be said with certainty is “now there is a test.” This is the disorienting time of schooling: all we can say with certainty is that tests happen. We write it down. There is, in fact, a whole apparatus of writing down, of keeping track of the changing now. “Today is...”

answer or not, knows this is a loaded prompt. It is not that “Night” is the *sensible* answer; it is that it is the expected answer. *Night, e.g.*<sup>27</sup> To write “now is night” is to already exceed the written line, to evoke a whole scenario of luminosity. As evidence, do we even need to say how this test continues? Isn’t this the rise and fall of ritual testing itself: follow the full cycle of disclosure, but at a distance? Open the note a few hours hence, in the light of day, so that it can be made to confess the measure of its (in)adequacy?

Following along closely, adding nothing but a record, we find the constant threat of caricature, as if it were the obscene double, the vengeance of the realization that the first word is not one’s own to give. It is as if, in being careful to add nothing, we discover not that we are faithful, but that the subject itself is already mocking us, is already a caricature. We never knew a night in itself. This is the scenario for example, that Jean-Francois Lyotard makes speak in his essay “Levinas’ Logic,” confronting the writings of Emmanuel Levinas with a hypothetical Hegelian critic:

In the third figure [good faith, ambivalence, and *persecution*] the commentator superadds to the alterity: since you ask for it, he says to Levinas, I will not treat you as my similar, but as my dissimilar; I can do you justice only by mistreating you. Indeed, if in your view to be just is to court alterity, then the only way to be just towards your discourse of justice is to be unjust about it.<sup>28</sup>

Witness the tripartite movement: I know what you are saying; what you are saying is confused; and it is you yourself who have asked me to treat you poorly. What has happened here?

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<sup>27</sup> The function of “off the cuff” examples in education seems to go largely unexamined, but should rightly accompany a study of curriculum in general, and particularly of subject matter deemed “necessary” or canonical. “The canon” functions by way of exemplary examples. Does one need to have read *Lord of the Flies*, e.g., and why? How often would we find that when the student is asked to read something, for example, on behavior and consequences, the intention is to place the words in their mouths, to have them speak by way of examples?

<sup>28</sup> Jean-François Lyotard, “Levinas’ Logic,” in *Face to Face with Levinas*, ed. Richard Cohen (Albany: SUNY Press, 1986), 118.

Levinas—displacing obligation from the proper order of things, from the thread of a historic record—has not just created a parallel track of difference, an alterity that cleaves to utterances, but has challenged the very notion of such a logical formulation. Obligation weighs on and disrupts time itself. To try to situate obligation according to a metalanguage elaborating the logic—the rules governing the linking of phrases—of Levinas’ ethics is to run up against this inversion, “logically absurd,” which (dis)locates obligation outside of any phrase or rule of linkage *presentable* by a metalanguage. It is in this sense that Lyotard, in evoking the Hegelian critic, follows the path of a seduction (we have not, it seems, left the question of *desire*): the seduction of commentary.

It is here, then, that we find ourselves, face to face with the dilemma, which is to say, all spun around. Lyotard, reading Levinas, imagines a hypothetical Hegelian critic, making him speak in parody of Levinas. The commentator is made to say, “See, I have understood you, I am speaking as you, even doing what you have told me.” But here comes the moment that has perhaps seduced us in advance, the anticipated spectacle (isn’t parody always directed towards the audience, not the one parodied?) and the persecution of laughter. The joke is that you have said nothing that I can understand: “The persecutor reasons thus: only alterity is just, the unjust is always the other of the just, and so all that is unjust is just.”<sup>29</sup> The persecution is in the twist, that little extra, the superaddition that like the mysterious writing hand pretends to change nothing. *All we have done is record in good faith...*

But how are we to understand this gesture? Lyotard’s Hegelian commentator is understanding alterity, it seems, as something encountered within the identical, the wraps of history, thus understanding justice in terms of a calculus of additions in which one is able to

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid.



manipulate the portion one attributes to this alterity. Levinas, we might say however, is indicating that it is not a question of *making* alterity any more than it is of *recording* it, of making it speak. The first word, expression itself, is never present as such, presented to an I who would then receive it or repeat it. The obligation felt prior to understanding is inscribed on the face of the Other, not as a sign but as the trace of the passage of the other beyond any sign. The face-to-face is not an *about-face*. The turnings of parody, slipping in from behind and at an angle, by “being you” so as to slip in behind what you have absented from and take it on as a mask, grotesque because it is frozen in time. This *about-face*, mirroring our foibles to great effect, paradoxically keeps us from facing and yet winds us all the tighter, commenters and commented. This is the ambivalent turning point, superadded to, spun a little harder. But just as it keeps us at odds, it also threatens to turn around, bringing us closer than we might have hoped.

The further we wind our way in, trying to find the bond between desire, the sensible object and our wrappings of it, the deeper we find ourselves in the dilemma of repeating, recording and caricature. How are we to make sense of the drama? Is a tragedy a comedy gone bad, or the other way around?

### **Tragicomedy: Schreber or Abraham**

On the one hand we can be quite precise on the distinction between tragedy and comedy, articulating, with Deleuze this time, the mechanisms that differentiate them.

There is a tragic and a comic repetition. Indeed, repetition always appears twice, once in the tragic destiny and once in the comic aspect. In the theatre, the hero repeats precisely because he is separated from an essential, infinite knowledge. This knowledge is in him, it is immersed in him and acts in him, but

acts as something hidden, like a blocked representation. The difference between the comic and the tragic pertains to two elements: first, the nature of the repressed knowledge—in the one case immediate natural knowledge, a simple given of common sense, in the other terrible esoteric knowledge; second, as a result, the manner in which ‘he does not know that he knows’.<sup>30</sup>

This might explain why we oscillate between jokes and bleak caricatures of education hinting at a larger tragedy: the repetitions are distinguishable only by the nature of the object and a manner of ignorance. But from what vantage point do we discern these, at what point do we receive the “punch-line?” The manner of ignorance is itself structural. Deleuze shines light on the dilemma:

In general the practical problem consists in this: this unknown knowledge must be represented as bathing the whole scene, impregnating all the elements of the play and comprising in itself all the powers of mind and nature, but at the same time the hero cannot represent it to *himself*—on the contrary, he must enact it, play it and repeat it until the acute moment that Aristotle called ‘recognition.’<sup>31</sup>

Everything comes to a head, or a head-smacking. One discovers that one has been swimming in it all along. As a reader, perhaps we have had premonitions, a foreboding sense: we see more than the character, we somehow follow along and watch from the side at the same time. But

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<sup>30</sup> Deleuze, *Difference and repetition*, 15. However, one could as easily turn to Freud’s agreement with “the authorities” on the matter: “Thus Fischer writes: ‘it is in the first place its sheer *form* that makes a judgment into a joke, and we are reminded of a saying of Jean Paul’s which, in a single aphorism, explains and exemplifies this precise characteristic of jokes—‘Such is the victorious power of sheer position, whether among warriors or words.’” Freud, *Jokes and their relation to the unconscious*, 16. A joke is a *playful* judgment. But what sets it to play, we should be cautious to note, is this ambiguity itself. Both Freud and Deleuze—if the former more than the latter—run the risk of suggesting that the scene can simply be laid out as a whole, rather than this itself being a function of the differential: to playfully or tragically say too little one must also say too much. There is no “sheer position” as such, only positions generated by *sheering*, by a mode of moving *more or less* along a line. Freud’s misstep, again, is to think this can be reduced, simply changing the mode of expression to arrive at the “original complete meaning, which can be inferred with certainty from a good joke.” Freud, *Jokes and their relation to the unconscious*, 23. A “Freudian Slip,” for example, rather than being conceived as a function of sheering, is simply a revelation of a suppressed truth. Likewise the form is reduced to linguistics, leaving the movements themselves untouched; which might explain why Freud’s choice of “exemplary” jokes is so often bad.

<sup>31</sup> Deleuze, *Difference and repetition*, 15.

this perhaps only masks our own uncertainty, marked by our need for the character to illuminate what we think we have known. Is this any different than the character's own familiarity and forebodings? The nature of the repetition will only be ascertained with the moment of Aristotelian "recognition."

But this brings us back to a Levinasian difficulty. We find ourselves thrown out in advance of ourselves. We encounter the other before we can recognize ourselves. If, in other words, we can be precise about the distinction in repetition between tragedy and comedy, this does us little good *at the time*. We go up against a monster with a spool of thread. Nothing ensures this will be heroic. This lack, it could be said, is precisely the monstrous itself.<sup>32</sup> This confronts us—as a kind of monstrous inversion—with the nature of Levinasian obligation: finding ourselves contested in advance by an Other who precedes our knowing, we find ourselves obliged. But we should resist the hypothetical Hegelian reading. If as Levinas suggests, the first word read in the face of the Other is "Thou shalt not kill" we should be wary of understanding this as an articulation of symbolic logic, never mind an actual utterance. Otherwise justice would be served only if every statement formulated the very word of justice. The imperative is never contained within the prescription itself. And yet we are called to respond, to say *something*. "Anything," we might be tempted to say, but if the content cannot be determined in advance according to rules of linkage, do we not often have a sense that we are not free to freely say anything? Our words establish a world in common. They matter.

The mistake, however, would be in imagining that the said of the Other somehow determined whether or not we should be obliged. The obligation felt before the face of the

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<sup>32</sup> Witness, for example the peremptory nature of the dispatch itself. The story does not break stride for the battle itself.

Other, whether it be God or SS officer, ordering one to kill, for example, must be taken up with the same responsibility as any other obligation. But it precisely does not oblige one to obey the content. “The will is free to assume this responsibility in whatever sense it likes; it is not free to refuse this responsibility itself; it is not free to ignore the meaningful world into which the face of the Other has introduced it.”<sup>33</sup> That it is Ishmael himself, thirsty in the desert, matters not, one is obliged. And uncertain. The precision of our distinction between tragedy and comedy is precisely what is precluded. We begin with a few jokes, and we discover ourselves in over our heads. Surely we must find a way to distinguish. Between what? How do you recognize? The question of false contenders will plague us from Odysseus to Plato and beyond.

But what if even the difference between the monstrous and the Other eludes us? Between “Thou shalt not kill” and “Thou are obliged to kill?” Are we Abraham, commanded by God, or Judge Schreber, Freud’s famous schizophrenic, receiving mysterious orders from the universe? Is this the monster itself: the Minotaur, half-man half-beast, the ambiguity that we are driven to slay so that there will be no slaying? This is Abraham’s plight; he must prove himself ready to kill, ignorant of the reason or outcome. It is precisely uncertainty that is encountered. In “Revelation and the Jewish Tradition,” Levinas writes, “Thus prophecy is suspicious of prophecy, and the person who commits himself to the Revelation runs a risk. We can see here the warning to be vigilant; this is the essential part of the Revelation, which does not leave worry behind.”<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and infinity : an essay on exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Boston: M. Nijhoff Publishers, 1979), 218-9.

<sup>34</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Face to face with Lévinas* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1986), 203.

Vigilance, then. But not without worry. And isn't this precisely the dilemma, that vigilance itself is a mode, a way of slaying monsters? Staying awake, the child intuitively knows, is the only—worrisome—way to keep the monsters under the bed. But the longer you listen into the dark, the more uncertain the voices become.<sup>35</sup> Is the voice we hear truly the voice of God: or is it a phantasm, a caprice of identity? Given the singularity of obligation, Abraham cannot even ask of another, "Did you hear that as well?" Nor is it a question of whether he is being set up, *he is*. The strictness of the bind is the dead giveaway. How then to be vigilant? How do we distinguish this from the inner rigorous turmoil of a Judge Schreber?

Levinas writes:

There is...a means of discriminating between personal originality brought to bear upon the reading of the Book and the play of the fantasms of amateurs (or even charlatans): this is provided by the necessity of referring subjective findings to the continuity of readings through history, the tradition of commentaries which no excuse of direct inspiration from the text allows one to ignore.<sup>36</sup>

Back to commentary then. Back to reading and writing alongside. We should be careful though to distinguish between this *history of reading*, and a *reading of history*, but also between the Book, which indicates an "abrupt invasion of truths from outside," and the Hegelian "notebook," the writing that adds nothing to what it records. The question, however, remains, only with more repetitions and variations: how does Abraham know that the command, discovered as a

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<sup>35</sup> Alphonso Lingis, in his essay "Nightwatch," suggests this reversal: the more we are vigilant, the more we become indistinguishable from the night itself. "An anonymous vigilance subsists in the heart of the night, a wakefulness that the incessant oncoming of the night maintains. The night watches. Insomnia senses a night beyond the night that interrupts and preserves the day." And again we find this odd reversal, in which the sequence is not just interrupted but in which night *erupts* in the midst of day, as an interior: "Do we not also know moments when the night summons us in the high noon of the world? [...] But when one hearkens to the wakefulness of sensibility in the inner night of one's organism, one can sense the summons of the night itself." Alphonso Lingis, *The imperative* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1998), 11.

<sup>36</sup> Levinas, *Face to face with Lévinas*, 196.

disruption in himself, comes from this exteriority? What memory, what thread, will allow us to recall both interiority and its rupture?

Time is not simply folded back on itself, looping around like a faithful commentary or a mysterious writing that touches nothing. It is already unhinged as well. Dis-articulated or disjointed. Memory disturbs the strand on its way out as well, erodes the rock from which it springs forth. One finds oneself unable to articulate, stuttering, and stumbling over words one has already said—words discovered to be not one’s own, but the commandment, on one’s own lips, of an Other never present as such. It is here, with this rupture, that Levinas locates obligation itself. The question that might plague us though is whether the very attentiveness Levinas calls us to also unseats any clear distinction between inside and outside, between I and Other. What happens when the words on one’s lips are not any longer anyone’s words, where even one’s lips are no longer one’s own? Do we discover a time when it is no longer clear who is commencing, when re-commencing is no longer attributable to anyone? Is this the time of history—the repetitions that we will attribute to singular individuals, but that lie down neatly, coil by coil—or is it the moment when history goes missing? Here the risk is even more acute, the difference between Schreber and Abraham, or between comedy and tragedy even more impossible to distinguish. Rather than calling for the misunderstanding of the persecutor/commentator—“since you ask for it I will not treat you as my similar, but as my dissimilar”—we might evoke a different non-sense, perhaps not so easily that of the fool: “I am just,” one might say, “only when it is no longer clear that it is even I who am being just.”

This is the dilemma of return. We repeat ourselves, follow the thread, and in doing so discover that nothing is certain. It is as if the Hegelian violence, in offering a caricature of Levinas, is not so easily recuperated or rebuffed. Was it a super-addition, a slander, or was the

offense instead to add nothing, to say what usually goes unsaid, to simply reflect the deep structural paradox of repetition itself? Was the Hegelian's error not in being rudely logical, but in not being impolite enough, preferring to allow a thread of etiquette that would allow us to return, to back away from this yawning chasm?

It is as if we discover two distinct modes of return—two methodologies, that are intertwined or buoyed by each other, but are also the very uncertainty of the other. In the Aristotelian sense, the drama unfolds, follows a particular line, with particular characteristics, but these are only understandable in relationship to the light that bathes the whole scene, permeates everything. The gap is the blindness, the ignorance of the scene, into which the character unspools the narrative thread. Every spool of thread hurls towards the gap that it is not.<sup>37</sup> Without a labyrinth that threatens to fray it as it turns a corner, without the blindness that makes one dark passage as easy or difficult to turn down as another, the thread cannot return. But, *in turn*, what is a labyrinth without a thread? Immersed in darkness, we look for a line to emerge. How quickly Hegel inserted the line of writing into the night. Maybe, however, it does not run down alongside time as a neutral record. Does not the changing of luminosity already emerge out of a line, the dawn dimly reminding us of the arc the sun will take before the sun is even visible as such? It does no good to think that one can articulate the linkage from one to another, or that they are two sides of a coin:  $1+1=1$ . Where would one stand; on what shore?

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<sup>37</sup> What is a spool itself, sitting so neatly on a shelf, but an ordered collapse, turning back on itself, seeking out the empty center, each loop laying into the gap and valleys created by other loops. Its efficiency is relentless tension. (It is when it is lost that the spool becomes instead a knot, a variable tension that can no longer hurl along, spooling up or sent racing through a stitch. To be sure, we would then have to articulate a whole taxonomy of knots: slip knots, lashings, monkey's fists (a knot made to hurl a line of it's own weight, once more into the breach), and so on.

## Oedipus and the Sea: Swimming, Surfing, Flying, Crawling, Walking, Stumbling

We should run the risk of following Deleuze at length here:

The movement of the swimmer does not resemble the wave, in particular, the movements of the swimming instructor which we reproduce bear no relation to the movements of the wave, which we learn to deal with only by grasping the former in practice as signs. That is why it is so difficult to say how someone learns: there is an innate or acquired practical familiarity with signs, which means that there is something amorous—but also something fatal—about all education. We learn nothing from those who say: “Do as I do”. Our only teachers are those who tell us to “do with me”, and are able to emit signs to be developed in heterogeneity rather than propose gestures for us to reproduce. In other words, there is no ideo-motivity, only sensory-motivity. When a body combines some of its own distinctive points with those of a wave, it espouses the principle of a repetition which is no longer that of the Same but involves the Other— involves difference, from one wave and one gesture to another, and carries that difference through the repetitive space thereby constituted. To learn is indeed to constitute this space of an encounter with signs, in which the distinctive points renew themselves in each other, and repetition takes shape while disguising itself. Apprenticeship always gives rise to images of death, on the edges of the space it creates and with the help of the heterogeneity it engenders. Signs are deadly when they are lost in the distance, but also when they strike us with full force. Oedipus receives a sign once from too far away, once from too close, and between the two a terrible repetition of the crime is woven.<sup>38</sup>

One swims by finding the gestures of motility, of travel, through a watery plenum. One surfs a wave, finds a line, but not by reproducing or representing a wave. It does no good to understand waves from the side, or to link the *idea* with *motility*. A plane stays aloft, finds the buoyancy of air, by finding a line through it, feeling its way—“Flying by the seat of your pants” pilots say. But the line the surfer or pilot finds is distinct from the surge of the wave or the differential pressures of the sliced and eddying air. The board “planes” as a result of this differential: it bites into, presses and disturbs the wave. And it is above all not to be confused with the gestures themselves. One does not *make* a line in surfing. One plays out the precarious

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<sup>38</sup> Deleuze, *Difference and repetition*, 23.



oscillations of balance, left and right, shifting pressures through the surface contact of the feet and board. Twisting and pushing, the variable relationship forming between the line of gravity and the movements of the spine and lengths of the body, emerge out of a shifting sense distinct from the line—quite the opposite: too much friction, too much force in the direction of the wave or the line of the board itself, and the foot slips, the line is lost, everything goes head-over-heels.

It is not a question of skill, or momentum. Whether one is treading water, fumbling in the dark, or carving a beautiful arc once more in the glistening sun; whether one's gestures are that of a student pilot jerkily landing solo for the first time or whether they constitute the very moves of infinity that Kierkegaard attributes to the knight of infinite resignation, having seen it all—the threat is the same. It is not just that “it is difficult to say how someone learns,” it is that in every moment one has not yet learned. Oedipus' “flaw” was that he was too smart for his own good: smart enough to get into deep water.

The answer to the riddle of the Sphinx—“What walks on four feet in the morning, two in the afternoon and three at night?”—is, of course, “A man.” But what exactly is the question? Perhaps: what is predictably variable, finding a locomotive line that is enumerated differently with the arcing of the sun? A day is a life is also a journey, but in no simple way, and progress brings us closer to the gap, the threshold. Oedipus steps surely through it, and it is the Sphinx that will go head over heels into the sea, but isn't this the very breach that will send Oedipus himself down a less certain line as well?<sup>39</sup> He knew how to count feet and took his two eyes for granted, destined to walk the surface of the earth with no line. How quickly we tend to want to

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<sup>39</sup> See for example: Jean-Joseph Goux, *Oedipus, philosopher* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993). Goux argues that the instantiation of the Oedipal myth marks a deviation from the standard heroic form, in which “man” both becomes central and crippled by intellect. An aborted hero.

retell even this sequence—4, 2, 3 ... -2, ∞—with a kind of sure footedness. Oedipus is a man, of course. The quintessential man. He is able to answer the riddle, the test, that no man before him could. But in doing so, the riddle becomes banal. Everyone afterwards will know it, will say it as a kind of repetition or evocation, will of necessity miss both the singularity of the question and the way in which it presages the whole scenario.<sup>40</sup> A leading question, a mock trial. Oedipus is the first to confess *that he is not the first*. Man is this...

It's not that we can't, or shouldn't learn how to avoid stumbling. It's that we all too easily mistake this *momentum*, smooth sailing, for movement. This is the Hegelian misstep in the face of his accusers: false movement.<sup>41</sup> Abstraction. The gestures of surfing are not the same as the abstract movements of waves or even the line of the board. "True movement" is neither that which rides as a line above the waves, nor is it that of the wave itself as a

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<sup>40</sup> "Oedipus' answer to the riddle of the Sphinx—'That being is man'—is repeated indiscriminately as enlightenment's stereotyped message, whether in response to a piece of objective meaning, a schematic order, a fear of evil powers, or a hope of salvation." Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of enlightenment: philosophical fragments* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 4.

<sup>41</sup> We are back to the quote with which we began this preface. But we are perhaps now in a position to be more precise. If it is "a question of...making movement itself work, without interposition...of inventing vibrations, rotations, whirlings, gravitations, dances or leaps" this does not simply take us to another mode, terrain, or sea. Rather we have to take seriously the *inventing* itself as the gesture, which may of course engender whirlings, but without returning us to an *ideo-motoric* stance. When whirling, this is not a movement *per se*, but the context for a gesture of variation. Something is introduced. Dancing is not an action. Action takes place within dancing, and dancing is an emergent context of and for inventive actions. This is the dangerous ambivalence of the term "gesture" that no critique of Hegel can eradicate. It is both something that one makes, and something that one repeats, that does not need making. The current interest in gesture as a mode of learning is both important and does little to reassure. (See, for example, the work of Barbara Tversky, at Teachers College: Barbara Tversky and Bridgette Martin Hard, "Embodied and disembodied cognition: Spatial perspective-taking," *Cognition* 110, no. 1 (2009).) On the one hand, this line of research rightly understands that the body has something critical to do with learning. On the other hand, it tends to repeat the standard gesture—can we even make *a usual gesture of learning?*—reducing movement to an external aid to thought. Learning, we might say, is this discrepancy, the move of displacing movement as a prosthetic—the self coming to its own aid.

knowable repetition. The movement that cleaves to difference, the line of balance and motility, threatens to swallow us again. Let us again follow Deleuze at length:

Everywhere, the depth of difference is primary. It is no use rediscovering depth as a third dimension unless it has already been installed at the beginning, enveloping the other two and enveloping itself as a third. Space and time display oppositions (and limitations) only on the surface, but they presuppose in their real depth far more voluminous, affirmed and distributed differences that cannot be reduced to the banality of the negative. It is as though we were in Lewis Carroll's mirror where everything is contrary and inverted on the surface, but "different" in depth...There is a false profundity in conflict, but underneath conflict, the space of the play of differences. The negative is the image of difference, but a flattened and inverted image, like a candle in the eye of the ox—the eye of the dialectician dreaming of a futile combat?<sup>42</sup>

The surfer, like the pilot, intuits on some level that they are not riding above things, but are immersed, part of the play of differences, the line drawn on the surface being a kind of phantasm, an effect of depth itself. But it is also in the depths that the identity formed in combat dissolves. We descend into the labyrinth only to discover the monstrosity of difference itself. Could it be that one does not leave the labyrinth after slaying the Minotaur, but rather that the only way to "slay the Minotaur" is to return to the surface?<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Deleuze, *Difference and repetition*, 51.

<sup>43</sup> Goux writes, "The chief difficulty arises from the existence of two seemingly incompatible motifs. On the one hand...the dragon is supposed to swallow, devour, and digest the neophyte, who will undergo a temporary death, but who will be regurgitated and spit out again in the end as a new man. On the other hand..., the dragon is killed by a hero as part of the victorious outcome of a difficult and bloody armed combat." Goux, *Oedipus, philosopher*, 45. It is not just, as Goux suggests, that in practice this incompatibility is attenuated by any number of slayings from *within*, but that the two motifs mark the essential ambiguity of each other. One element or another can seem to disappear or be emphasized, but this too is part of the tension. A murder goes underground, unseen. A dragon is slain in broad daylight, but it alters the hero anyway. What is essential is the linkage, the double gesture.

We might even go so far as to suggest that the double gesture demands a kind of short cut, an evasion of the monster, who we all *know* is fanciful anyway. Ariadne's thread is a red herring. Either one wanders thoroughly, discovers nothing, and returns claiming the monster is no more, or one waits a sufficient amount of time by the entrance, playing "cat's cradle," e.g.. This is the strange sense of Kurt Vonnegut's novel of the same name, borrowed from the child's game of string that the fictional co-creator of the atomic bomb is playing while the (monstrous) bomb is dropped. (Or is it that the modern

## Hunker Down and Keep Moving: Methodology in End Times

When time ends, when the thread is torn, or hanging—the horror is to discover the logic of the minimal remainder itself. Rather than being an end, all we are left with is the stark repetition itself, of day and night, of the continual assault of a variable luminosity. In post-apocalyptic imagery the sun itself sears and blinds us, scorches the earth. A dusty blind, pulled from the window it was left covering, does not reveal, it re-enacts the loss, returns us to the brutality of repetition, day follows night. This minimal difference, stark time, is what threatens to allow the demons through, the endless variations that history kept at bay. The method for the survivor of the end is simple: repeat the unraveling story. *Hold on. Keep going.*

Hunker down *and* keep moving.

Is this the methodology we should choose? Should we believe the game is up? Not at all. But the thesis, it would seem, is that there is a deep mythological structure to the ways in which the discourse of education repeats itself, and as we shall see—if it does not already bathe the scene—it is a mythology of descent and emergence, of death (of some sort) and what comes after it. And if “apprenticeship always gives rise to images of death,” we might go further and say that a methodology of end-times is always already at work in educational discourse. In so many ways, we rehearse the end, in large part by recounting it—sparely, but *ad nauseum*. This may or may not be a troubling formulation, but it is not without endless coilings, whether they would or could ever prove exhaustive. In that sense, then, we will never be too far off from a methodology of deadly endings and minimal remainders. As if we were trying to understand

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Minotaur is the garish adult playing with string while the world outside burns?) We might also note, on the island of San Lorenzo in the novel, that while the ostensibly Christian government banishes and punishes with death the practice of Bokononism, a made up and essentially frivolous religion, it turns out that this is just to give the religion, which practically everyone practices, a bit of excitement. Kurt Vonnegut, *Cat's cradle* (New York,: Delacorte Press, 1963).

what, of all of this, matters. A test to cut through the knots. What will we choose to remember, what will be left to hold onto? Having it, do we venture forth, spooling out the thread of a future? Finding ourselves at a loss, can we find our way home, follow the tenuous thread to sanctuary? The story proves elusive. “[R]epetition takes shape while disguising itself.” If we are to recognize the ways in which it operates, come to understand something of what we tend to do, *how we tend to talk when we talk about education*, we ourselves may need to stay close, to follow an economy of scarcity. Don’t stray too far from the path.

And yet, the question will plague us: what is at stake in this way of following? What is disguised? What strange repetitions will we find ourselves uttering as if they were our own? If we rehearse a continual discourse of end-times—if *now* is always pre or post death—what variations might we be keeping at bay? If anything we will discover that the closer we try to follow things, the stricter the path, the more uncertain things become. The end times both call for the most careful and ethical of actions and appear to license the most violent of ruptures or oppressions. To follow the path too closely is to run the risk of simply being complicit, authentic to a caricature. What is left? There is a radical ambivalence that will pervade this work, an uncertainty to methodology itself. We are feeling our way. Or not. On the one hand we will hint at a sweeping scope, the pervasive deep structure, the unavoidability of it, even when we think we have left it behind. On the other we will be hard pressed to say what to make of it, where to go, what to do. Confronted with a desire to sweep aside the curtain and reveal the mechanisms of repetition around educational discourse, what we will perhaps discover is that “the great reveal” is itself one of the forms by which we repeat the narrative. We will thus also find a more modest desire, to move a little differently, to either take pleasure in the minute oscillations and sensations that are to be found in the recounting, or to “surf,”

carving across boundaries, following a crest, swooping down a slope that is usually taken at a walk, odd digressions. The tone will no doubt waver. Typical signposts will be forgotten, or carefully elided. Marks in the road will be scuffed out. We will follow a classic line only to be reminded of something that somehow seems nearby, a movie, a memory of a classroom, something personal. Capricious. There is no guarantee that the threads hold. But that too is a suspicion, that either more threads hold than we might imagine, that we overlook the *relevance* of so many mundane things, or that not everything need be threaded. Jump the trail. Follow a personal whim. At the very least, this document will reflect the kinds of biases, the habits of moving, the frustrations, the weird associations or blindspots of its “author.” Perhaps in the hope that they will resonate with others, but perhaps also in the hope that not everything resonates, or is captured.

Nevertheless, we can state, quite easily, what the structure will look like. The whole work will follow a spatial narrative. One starts lost at sea, or banished from one’s home city for crimes of madness. Approaching the shores of a city, one climbs the hill, where one will offer sacrifices to the gods and instantiate a “new city” in the same place. Then one leaves, descending again. This will be the loose structure of what follows. Attempting to approach the city from a distance, we will see if we cannot discern some of the looming characteristics of the drama itself. Rather than racing to the top, we will spend some time examining the mythological and cosmological models that serve as the backdrop for any encounter with what we will take to be a central city for education, Athens. Having climbed the hill, we will immediately find ourselves plunged back into darkness as we attempt to follow the story Plato will tell about his city, in the Cave Allegory. We will then descend from Athens to see how the narrative is displaced, for example, in the myth of Theseus, in the discourse, architecture, and

cities of the Middle Ages, in the current language of “occupation.” Until eventually we find ourselves at sea again, out at the limit, where it is unclear whether we are inside or outside, whether education is your ticket in, or your way out.

So that is the map. But like the Situationists, who would often attempt to learn something by following maps but from different cities than the one they were navigating, we may find that being too sure of where we are is something of a missed opportunity. A more radical reading of this practice would be to suggest that having the “correct” map for a city might simply mean that we are not navigating the city we thought we were, but another more elusive city. If we are following this cyclic journey we should be careful not to think we know where we are going. Somewhere between an essay—an attempt or trial—and the Situationist’s practice of *derive*, or wandering. An attempt to wander, a wandering attempt. Francesco Careri, in *Walkscapes* suggests that the origins of architecture are not in caves but in paths, in the stone markers and worn lines that we follow and partake in.<sup>44</sup> As we will see, the one is always folding into the other. The way we move shapes up our world around us, which in turn gives dictates to the way we move. As we wind our way along, we may find that we are not sure where we are exactly, or how we got there. The city may loom into view, only to dip below the horizon again, like an erratic sun. We may find ourselves following strange passages, feeling out the lay of the land, repeating or contradicting ourselves. In that sense, we might do well enough to remember: *Hold on. Keep moving.*

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<sup>44</sup> Francesco Careri, *Walkscapes: camminare come pratica estetica* (Torino: G. Einaudi, 2006).

## Rag Tag Methodology: Hyperbolic Fabric, and Using a Tie as a Belt

In other words, the story will be recounted in its multiple iterations, creating the context for a larger story exploring the repetition itself. We could conceive of it as telling the story of the story of education. Since the point will be to attempt to open this repetitive cycle onto something new, it makes little sense to borrow a methodology from the existing disciplines. Rather than engaging in a philosophical, or historical reading, for example, these aspects will be used as the backdrop for a narrative retelling. However, nor can we stray far. In attempting to tell a new story about old things, we would have to be careful to not think one can simply apply a new methodology from the outside, even such a simple one. Rather the point is to use narrative to get us closer to the felt sense of this story. Likewise with the strategy of repetition. These are dictated by the nature of the subject itself.

But how do we read this subject? And again? Pierre Bayard's excellent book, *How to Talk About Books You Haven't Read*, articulates amongst other things, the real challenge that actually reading books presents.<sup>45</sup> While the title is something of a provocation—perhaps a trap for those who will fall for it as an attack on books or reading, that is, those who won't in fact have read it—the more fundamental aggression of the book is to point out the dilemma we find ourselves in of having read books already. Reading a book, we are confronted with the question of what it will do to us. Books, we know, repeat on us. But this points to the second aspect of the dilemma: before we read a book, we have already read it. The book is never read for the first time. Reading situates us within a network of repetitions, such that “not reading” becomes itself a way of reading and repeating.

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<sup>45</sup> Pierre Bayard, *How to talk about books you haven't read*, trans. Jeffrey Mehlman (New York, NY: Bloomsbury USA, 2007).



The self-taught man of Sartre's *Nausea*, reading his way through the library, is disturbing, not because we presage his sexual perversion (which merely reflects his more primary educational perversion), nor because of the absurdity of his task, but because he seems able to do the thing we often pretend is possible, or even insist upon but would of course never truly do, which is *go in order*. Or rather, to act as if he hadn't already read everything or even anything, in order to actually set out to read everything, one book at a time. It would be one thing if he were just more able to carry through the charade than most, going through the motions of thoroughness—following the arbitrariness of the alphabet being as adequate as any other method, once one actually believes one will finish. Here we could read his sexual perversion as the inevitable crack that forms from such absurd discipline, finding its way into public. But the deeper discomfort stems from the feeling that he is not keeping up airs at all: that he has shown us everything. There is nothing left to the imagination. With no remainder, he neither gets ahead nor seems troubled by what is behind. In a word, in reading he doesn't seem to *read*.

This is the dilemma we are faced with each repetition, even if we refuse to read. How do we repeat ourselves? If one were looking for a methodological handbook for repetition, one would do well to study Deleuze's *Difference and Repetition*.<sup>46</sup> Understanding his own work as storytelling, Deleuze suggests a mode of understanding difference and repetition as immanent, unfolding concepts, that have a life distinct from the work to which they have been put in buttressing identity and sameness. Likewise, heading Deleuze and Guattari's concern with the way in which metaphor has been given such primacy in linguistics, we will attempt to neatly sidestep a "metaphorology" for a more serious endeavor. Even recent work in linguistics, such

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<sup>46</sup> Deleuze, *Difference and repetition*.

as that by Lakoff and Johnson, attempting to show the deeply essential nature of metaphor—recovering it from its ornamental status to the foundational matter out of which our abstract thought emerges—does little to get us closer to the stakes of this particular story.<sup>47</sup> An examination of the metaphors by which we understand metaphors only winds us tighter into the circles.

Moving away from metaphorology we might turn to iconology. Largely co-opted by the structuralism of its later followers, the critical iconology of Aby Warburg nevertheless suggests a fruitful approach.<sup>48</sup> Following repetitions and variations of icons through time, these images are set in relationship and motion, while avoiding the typical teleological reading. Take for example Warburg's approach to Western European Classicism, where he finds less a mere repetition, recovery, and return to ancient themes, than an attempt to set them in motion, resisting static repetition. Moving through diverse fields of cultural expression he would find continuities, collapsing the usual accounts of historic distance and progress, only to show the lines of tension through a sort of "montage-collision."

Likewise, using the strategy of repeating the story of education, in its variations, the point is not to uncover the structural underpinnings, or mythic foundations of education. Rather, by looping variations back onto themselves, it allows us the opportunity to trace new connections, and set in motion elements that have been fixed by habit.

For that matter, take a rather unorthodox methodology: that of crochet. Seemingly distant, the typically feminine handicraft has more to do with the city than we might think.

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<sup>47</sup> George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Philosophy in the flesh : the embodied mind and its challenge to Western thought* (New York: Basic Books, 1999); George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors we live by* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).

<sup>48</sup> Philippe-Alain Michaud, *Aby Warburg and the image in motion* (New York: Zone Books, 2004).

McEwen suggests that it is the weaving central to every early Greek household that might have led to the notion of the grid that will continue to haunt urban planning up until the present moment. It is in the loom that we find the dimensions of the *polis*. And even a cursory examination would find cloth and clothing as essential, even foundational elements of the rituals of the early polis itself. And yet, how is it that this repetitive art has taken us from flexible fabric to fixed, gridded space?

Indeed, if it weaves its way through the fabric of the city, if it *is* quite literally the fabric of the city, we should not be surprised if, like Ariadne's thread, we find its tenuous thread running through our imagery of end times as well. One can imagine an analysis of the torn and patched garments of post-apocalyptic movies, of threadbare and patched fabrics, of rent skin stitched back together in a makeshift hospital, harder objects swept to the side or extricated, replaced with some bedding, or a rent garment repurposed to staunch the flow of blood. Even here we might find a hierarchy of traumatized clothing, even an aesthetic of cuts and patterns. How far off the beaten track are we now? Perhaps only Ariadne's thread could tell us. But isn't this part of the strange fabric of educational discourse itself, the way in which it is obsessed with not being obsessed with clothing? Relegated to home economics, textile arts—threads in general we could say—are systematically replaced with a hard ocular scene of chairs, textbooks, and signs, the navigation of which is by way of a paper trail. Does the thread, for all of that, go away? Is not the suppression of fabric one of the ways in which this grid is held together? We seem always chagrined to have to be talking about uniforms, or about the sagging pants, gang colors, rising hemlines and hats that uniforms hold at bay.<sup>49</sup> The endless

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<sup>49</sup> From hooding to hoodlum, for further example, the hood that is the sign of educational conferral is both essentially the same, and radically other, than the hood that evoked suspicion and violence in the

chaotic rebellious unraveling and recombining of clothing winds us up. Even when fabric is gridded and uniform it threatens to be turned, rewoven. Take the collar, for example. The collar/tie apparatus, apparently vestigial, marks the effort to *finish* the edge, to tie it off into an architectural structure. But even this threatens to be turned, or turned up, with all the ambivalence this entails. A sign of defiance, the upturned collar can also mark the wearer as a poser: stooge to the system. What was preppyness but the interest found in this ambivalence? A tie used as a belt both undermines the architectural order of finishing knots, and potentially re-cinches it. If it is not already an ambivalent gesture, then it is redoubled when this gesture itself is taken up and incorporated into the gestures of educational literature itself.<sup>50</sup>

When we ask a high-schooler, “What does Finny’s wearing of a tie as a belt signify,” what are we asking? Even more banal would be the formulation: “In *A Separate Peace*, what does Finny wear instead of a belt?” On one level it is obvious to everyone. The question is really, “did you even read the book?” But the more elusive question is what are we doing when we choose to be banal about such things? We should head off the obvious contrast, which would be to insist that it is simply a poor approximation in contrast with the possibility of an alternative route in which both students and teacher hunker down to taking on the task with high seriousness. “The belt, to me, signifies...” This is high theater. The reversal can be seen in

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recent killing of Trayvon Martin. The public covering of identity, in either case, is both deeply ambivalent and not neutral. The smallest of differences, the orientation of a tassel, can make all of the difference between life and death, either metaphorically and ritually or quite literally.

<sup>50</sup> I hesitate to say “the canon” since this misses the specificity of this uptake. But a category such as “English Literature,” for example, only obfuscates its own subject. One does not *read* English Literature, one *takes* it. The object is thus not what it seems. That this mode of discourse can run simultaneously alongside a pedagogic discourse involving “reading lists,” books broken down by age appropriateness, and so on, while preserving their distinctness, is telling. At the very least, we could perhaps paint the broad strokes of a shadowy literature that exists precisely for their pedagogic function—books for schooling.

any number of educational movies, marking “the moment” when things start clicking. The student confesses that they 1) want to learn, 2) can connect the book to their lives, and 3) don’t want to be fuck-ups. It is not that it is not a parody of something that we also know more authentically. Something magical can happen with books, and that turning point is one we can find many ways to situate ourselves around. But what if the tie doesn’t signify anything? What if it operates? Holds up his pants. What if it is another line being drawn, another coil (look, just as you can loop around this way, you can keep going...) another writing? The function of recording, “Ariadne’s Thread,” the logicians are clear, can be anything or no “thing.” It can be a pencil trace, an actual thread, a chalk mark on the board, or a “mental note.” The fact that it is interchangeable, however, (a tie for a belt) doesn’t turn it into a signifier, as if, since it can be anything, it thus must be a stand-in for an abstraction. On the contrary, it precisely does not signify, it runs along, it moves with us. The logicians are right, but by pointing to the practical manipulation of it: the tie ties.

It is in making this movement a signifier that the gesture is reincorporated into the edifice of education, as its canon. Indeed, it banks on the movement, operationalizes it, makes it signal. In the movie *Dead Poet’s Society*, the students are encouraged to serialize the gesture of standing on chairs, thus localizing their insistent yearning for the *liveliness* of dead poets, on leaving the citadel for a secret cave. And above all we see this emerging above ground again, engaging in a public theater wearing puckish tights, which demands its cold hard sacrifice. Is this a challenge to the all-too-alive dead edifices of schooling, or is it what keeps it going as its internalized dream? Is it significant, or is it precisely busy?

One would do well to engage in the methodology of turning threads if one were to try to understand this tension that at the level of solids appears as a rupture, a break in the earth

itself. Indeed, it is in crochet that we find the model that most directly challenges the Euclidean mapping of space.<sup>51</sup> One loop linking through the next, and either expanding regularly or connecting in rows, one can easily discover a flat plane. But by adding variation into the rate of expansion or into the regularity of the rate itself, one discovers in the first instance a hyperbolic space, and in the second the suggestion of organic forms themselves.

By folding and moving the hyperbolic plane one discovers that Euclid's postulate of parallel lines is easily broken, allowing an infinite number of parallel lines through any given point, rather than just one. The result is that lines of tension, folding, and repetitions can bring us to multiple different mappings and functions. Not only do these dynamic possibilities suggest a different approach to urban studies, but they also suggest that the relatively fixed repetitions of the narrative of urban education have yet to exhaust the urban and educational variations. For example, the hyperbolic expansion possible in crochet might evoke for us a different, organized and organic model of the usual story of massification, sprawl and chaos.

To the continuous line crocheting back on itself to form dynamic space, we might add the Situationist practice of the *derive*. As an aesthetic practice, it has much in common with the perpetual suspense of the city characterized by the image of the elevator failing to fall evoked earlier. Performance art as a non-event, the wandering of the Situationists through the city was designed to bring the actual functions of the city to the surface, shifting them in the process. This is perhaps the working methodology of the city itself, built at the crossroads, accumulating down walkways and cow paths, determining even the most abstract and apparently timeless of gridded plans.

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<sup>51</sup> Margaret Wertheim, *A field guide to hyperbolic space* (Canada: The Institute For Figuring, 2007). Daina Taimina, *Crocheting adventures with hyperbolic planes* (Wellesley, MA: A K Peters, 2009).

Although one might as easily speak of Foucault's genealogical method, especially as it relates to its indebtedness to Nietzsche (and hence bring us to a discussion of the eternal recurrence of the same), or to Deconstruction, it nevertheless seems more fitting to the urban nature of the subject to stick with what is at hand: with stories and walking, with loops and repetitions, with a tactile art of surface, variation, continuous growth and folding. Methodologically the story will be allowed to unfold, linking back on itself, generating not so much a trite repetition, but a layering and linking that generates an excess that exceeds the apparent space at hand.

## **Inventory and Taking Stock**

So where are we? Let's check the status of our thesis: An intuition that the fate of education and the fate of the city are intricately tied. The layering in of stories of birth, that show their deep connection to an underworldly place. The realization that this place is not on the other side of life, but an experience of the city itself. A sense of the deeply repetitive structure of the urban birth story as a perpetual task. Add in the Shakespearian spatial logic that posits all exits as entrances somewhere else, and we begin to see a pattern of understanding education as a perpetually deferred egress. The need for movement, the urgent call for progress, neutralized by the equally powerful call for nothing cataclysmic to happen. The displacement of responsibility for both the threat of cataclysm and the resistance to progress onto the urban masses. Ignorance and resistance.

All of this, then, arranged around an attempt to engage with the narrative logic of urban education in a way that allows us to engage differently with it, to recognize what we are

doing. A methodology that involves spinning away from the disciplinary approaches, no matter how radical, that have their roots deeply within the story itself. Not, of course, to step finally outside of the narrative, but instead by running down and around the loops of the story we will find ourselves close to all sorts of traditional moments: a philosophical speculation, a historic situating, a social critique. We will find ourselves engaging with a rich source of literatures, each in their own way contributing to an understanding of the story, while often unaware of the strong narrative forces dictating their own perspective.

A rag tag collection at best. Telling the story of the perpetual failure of education, while wandering more or less aimlessly through the city, noticing the brickwork. This is the proposal.

The thesis is one of repetition with all of the challenges that this poses. Not only does the story show up everywhere in education; the argument could be made that this story of education is properly speaking the story of the city. Which is to say that it is a primary story of civilization as we know it. It is with the emergence of urban centers that we find the birth of education in its recognizable form. And this narrative takes its place at the very heart of the social project. It is to become a privileged way in which the city reflects on its own past, present and future as civilization itself. All this to suggest that the influence of the story not only permeates educational discourse, but perhaps civilized discourse in general.

On the other hand, for it to be operative, and effortlessly repeatable, it must also become nothing much at all, an effortless shrug meaning hardly anything, a political slogan, a shorthand—"Urban Education," a nod, if even that, to the proper place of education. It permeates everything by receding into the background, just as one can never truly see the forest for the trees, the city for the buildings.



Everywhere and nowhere, then. And still one must proceed. This is the strange remainder of end times, too much and too little. The survivor is constantly taking stock, assessing the resources of their surroundings.

One could perhaps begin with a first watershed moment: Plato's cave allegory. Prior to that one would find the classical studies on mythology. The recent feminist readings of the myths of Athena, for example, in *The Sacred and the Feminine in Ancient Greece*.<sup>52</sup> And one would have to then turn to attempts to read these myths within the larger context of Athenian life, say in the work of Nicole Loraux, especially in the context of birth, with her *The Children of Athena*, and the ways in which the imagery of the city itself begins to split, with *The Divided City*.<sup>53</sup> One could begin to trace this emerging imagery of the city and of downgoings through the architecture and urban planning itself, looking at Indra Kagis McEwen's *Socrates' Ancestor: An Essay on Architectural Beginnings*.<sup>54</sup> The architectural forms would show up again in the work of Joseph Rykwijk as references to embodiment and heroic myth, but will be blown to the wind by Francesco Careri, in *Walkscapes*, arguing that the first architecture is not based on the cave, the interior, but on the journey, the path.<sup>55</sup> And then one would most certainly want to look even further into the relationship between caves and journeys, for example, in the mythic precursors to Athena in Mesopotamian tales of female downgoing, looking at such works as

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<sup>52</sup> Sue Blundell and Margaret Williamson, *The sacred and the feminine in ancient Greece* (London ; New York: Routledge, 1998).

<sup>53</sup> Nicole Loraux, *The divided city: on memory and forgetting in ancient Athens* (New York: Zone Books, 2002). Nicole Loraux, *The children of Athena: Athenian ideas about citizenship and the division between the sexes* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

<sup>54</sup> Indra Kagis McEwen, *Socrates' ancestor: an essay on architectural beginnings* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993).

<sup>55</sup> Careri, *Walkscapes: camminare come pratica estetica*.

*Greek Myths and Mesopotamia: Parallels and Influences in the Homeric Hymns and Hesiod*.<sup>56</sup> This would be only the entrance into the labyrinthine underworld of downgoing and sacrifice. With Plato, and even more specifically with the cave allegory, the commentary is endless, and yet insistently philosophical, which is to say that it rarely takes time to situate itself within the narrative structures that Plato borrows to his own end or within the urban context. In many ways this is the legacy that Plato himself sets for us. Of the close readings of the cave allegory itself, we should note Heidegger's lectures in *The Essence of Truth* and Luce Irigaray's *Speculum of the Other Woman*.<sup>57</sup> John Sallis' re-reading of *The Republic* in *Being and Logos*, however, is one of the few gestures towards understanding the story within the context of mythic downgoing.<sup>58</sup>

Thus on one side of the watershed we have an endless series of tales making sense of birth, sacrifice and downgoing in relationship to the city. And on the other side we have a formalized narrative of educational resistance crafted out of those narratives, that nevertheless recedes in the face of the abstraction that it also grounds. It turns out to be a discipline-shaping narrative, and hence difficult to treat, or even particularly notice, within the fields of philosophy or education.

One might then think to proceed methodologically, to work backwards teasing out the implications of these urban tropes and references to birth. To use the coinage of Hans Blumenberg, exemplified beautifully by Barbara Maria Stafford in *Body Criticism: Imaging the*

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<sup>56</sup> Charles Penglase, *Greek myths and Mesopotamia: parallels and influence in the Homeric hymns and Hesiod* (New York: Routledge, 1994).

<sup>57</sup> Martin Heidegger, *The essence of truth: on Plato's cave allegory and Theaetetus* (New York: Continuum, 2002); Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the other woman* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1985).

<sup>58</sup> John Sallis, *Being and logos : reading the Platonic dialogues* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996).

*Unseen in Enlightenment Art and Medicine*, we might engage in “metaphorology.”<sup>59</sup> Here, to ground the study of metaphor in an extra-linguistic place, to take it seriously as referring to worldly conditions rather than an endless circling of linguistic signifiers, we would want to turn to the recent work of Lakoff and Johnson.<sup>60</sup> The challenge, however, is to find ways to understand this extra-linguistic reference as something other than a supplement. They argue that rather than being merely ornamental to abstract thought, metaphors are essential for the possibility of thought itself. What this means is that we would be authorized to begin to tease out the essential role of urban and birth metaphors in their abstract hiding places in the discourses of philosophy and education.

However, in doing so, we would run a number of risks. First, we might easily miss the ways in which the very language of language, the metaphors of metaphors, are at work. In particular we would have to see the ways in which the history of educational metaphors itself informs our ways of thinking about metaphor and language. We would have to note this watershed moment of Plato’s where metaphor, myth, logos and education are set spinning on a particular course. Our notions of metaphor and language are themselves shaped by the fundamental “metaphor” of educational interiority. A deeper study of metaphorology would bring us to a more convoluted stance towards metaphors, either deepening the linguistic commitment to analysis, or bringing us, with Derrida or Ricouer to a more intractable position, shifting analysis into a condition of impossibility and play. Either way we would run the risk of

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<sup>59</sup> Barbara Maria Stafford, *Body criticism : imaging the unseen in Enlightenment art and medicine* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1991).

<sup>60</sup> See: Lakoff and Johnson, *Philosophy in the flesh : the embodied mind and its challenge to Western thought*. And: Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors we live by*.

imagining that it is the metaphor itself that should guide our efforts. And so we will have to leave this rich literature by the wayside, along with the philosophical commentaries.

Better then to track the gestures themselves, as the “metaphor” goes underground, so to speak. Here we could notice the thematic orientation towards ignorance and resistance. Just as to venture into the underworld is to risk being turned to stone, to engage in education proper is to orient towards these petrifying conditions. The story of urban education is a zombie movie, an escape from the living dead.

And yet, Education, and its endless discourses, theoretically oriented towards knowledge, in urban practice is oriented towards ignorance and struggle. The knowledge that education proffers is a solution to this mass problem, to the problem of the masses. This would be simple, except for two hindrances. On the one hand, education itself seems to be rather ignorant about what learning looks like.<sup>61</sup> This ignorance will recede into the background, displaced by the narrative of the ignorant masses. The glib reversals of Plato or Erasmus wind us only deeper into the story.<sup>62</sup> Avital Ronell’s *Stupidity* presents a more sober evaluation, albeit without foray into its native terrain of education.<sup>63</sup> She nevertheless leaves us with an important caution against waging war on stupidity, one that would be well headed by the educationally minded. Jacques Ranciere’s *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* enters this terrain with such a caution apparently in mind, disrupting the classic assumptions of the roles of

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<sup>61</sup> See for example, the discussion of “the look” of learning in: Elizabeth Ann Ellsworth, *Places of learning: media, architecture, pedagogy* (New York: Routledge, 2005). For an interesting discussion of this dilemma from a research perspective see: Nuthall, G. (2005). “The Cultural Myths and Realities of Classroom Teaching and Learning: A Personal Journey” TC Record.

<sup>62</sup> Desiderius Erasmus, *The praise of folly* (New York: Barnes & Noble Books, 2004).

<sup>63</sup> Avital Ronell, *Stupidity* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002).

knowledge and ignorance.<sup>64</sup> Likewise, Herbert Kohl's "*I Won't Learn From You*" poses the possibility of an educational force to ignorance itself, that in many ways seems to evoke the Socratic stance while challenging the distribution of roles.<sup>65</sup>

One would also do well to note the gestures of resistance that cleave to education, again shifting roles, taking on a positive force, in the anti-oppressive strategies of critical pedagogy, and in some forms of multicultural education. Here one might cite Paulo Freire as well as bell hooks's work on the oppositional gaze.<sup>66</sup> While works such as these help us re-envision what to make of resistance when we encounter it in educational contexts, what is more difficult to account for is the narrative force that puts resistance and education at the heart of educational discourse in the first place. In this sense these works share a commonality with the dominant story of education beginning with Plato.

Separating out these themes does little to answer this dilemma, and we find ourselves returning to the "metaphor" of the city. Ignorance and resistance do not happen in a vacuum, but have their hellishly proper place. Turning to Urban Education as a field, however, we find the literature characterized either by an attempt to observe, understand and redress the inequalities that plague urban education in general; or by small scale, school or city level, social observation of these same conditions for *specific* affected social groups. While admirable, again, we find that the "urban" rather than being an area of study, seems to be a kind of shorthand for educational difficulty and inequality itself.

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<sup>64</sup> Jacques Rancière, *The ignorant schoolmaster: five lessons in intellectual emancipation* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1991).

<sup>65</sup> Herbert R. Kohl, *I won't learn from you: and other thoughts on creative maladjustment* (New York, NY: New Press, 1994).

<sup>66</sup> Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (New York: Continuum, 1993); bell hooks, *Black looks : race and representation* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1992).

The foundational works in this history do little to separate us out from this narrative, tending to tell the same story from different perspectives, with different spin. The progressive agenda will speak of social progress, while the revisionists will speak of the oppression that these progressive tales support. But all will agree on the essential urban problematic that education must strive against. It is Sol Cohen who most clearly shows the repetitive and cyclic history of the history of urban education, in *Challenging Orthodoxies: Toward a New Cultural History of Education*.<sup>67</sup> One can follow this cycle easily enough, but it is the point of commonality that is most telling. Take David Tyack's *The One Best System: A History of American Urban Education*, the first concerted effort to address the urban aspect directly.<sup>68</sup> Collapsing the urban problematic to one of vast changes of scale, in essence making it an organizational problem, Tyack attempts to bridge the progressive and revisionist positions. Tellingly, despite his own cautions, he is drawn into a tragic stance towards the city itself. If there is hope, it is that the failures looming be narrowly averted. Later work will borrow this stance, driven by the notion of the city as a crisis. Thus turning to the history of American Urban Education, far from finding ourselves closer to answering the question of why the urban "metaphor" follows so essentially this tragic structure, we find instead its unexamined repetition. Far from encountering our object, we find the cycle of repetition. We cannot understand the urban, or education, without it.

It is as if we find ourselves already on our way. To and from a city.

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<sup>67</sup> Sol Cohen, *Challenging orthodoxies: toward a new cultural history of education* (New York: P. Lang, 1999).

<sup>68</sup> David B. Tyack, *The one best system: a history of American urban education* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974).

# Chapter I: Educational Approach

Guildenstern: We were sent for.  
That's why we're here... traveling.

“A matter of extreme urgency... a royal summons,” his very words...  
“official business no questions asked. Up we get and off at the gallop,  
fearful lest we come too late!”

Rosencrantz: Too late for what?

Guildenstern: How would I know? We haven't got there yet.

—Tom Stoppard, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*, Scene 1<sup>69</sup>

## A Coney Island of the Mind: Ruin and Remainder

The fires raged again. Coney Island has been razed to the ground by fires more than once in its life, only to be rebuilt again. But this time it was just another practice run, a show for the masses. Every day the miniature mock city of Fighting the Flames burns, hidden deep within the classic architecture of its exterior, threatening to collapse in hellish flames on the inside. Before the spectator's eyes, the crack crew—drawn from some four thousand resident, actual fire fighters—narrowly averts disaster, extinguishing the blaze. Everything is restored. And then the fires rage again for the next crowd.

Coney Island is a kaleidoscope of cities. Cities within cities next to cities built upon previous cities. The endless multiplication and distortion of the hall of mirrors. In the first decade of the twentieth century, for example, visitors to Coney Island might find within it

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<sup>69</sup> Stoppard, *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern are dead*.

Lilliputia, a half size city for some three hundred dwarfs, both a fantasmatic display and an actual residence, a working city.

Rem Koolhaas, in his book *Delirious New York*, tells a story that shows both the cities preparation and rehearsal of its own demise, and a strange inversion of fantasy and actuality:

In May 1911 the lighting system in the devils that decorate the facade of Dreamland's End of the World short-circuits. Sparks start a fire that is fanned by a strong sea wind.

Only weeks before a superior fire-fighting apparatus has been installed; the ground has been dug up once more, to add new water mains and hydrants. But somehow the new ducts have not been connected with the Atlantic, inexhaustible fire extinguisher. In shock, the fire fighters of Fighting the Flames [another Coney Island attraction] are first to desert their dormitories and the confines of Dreamland.

As real fire fighters arrive on the scene, they find no more pressure in the system than 'a garden hose.'

Fireboats are kept at a distance by the heat. Only Lilliputia's midget fire fighters -confronted with the real thing after +/- 2,500 false alarms- put up a real fight against the holocaust; they save a small piece of their Nuremburg -the fire station- but otherwise their actions are hopeless.<sup>70</sup>

A dream city, on the cooling waters, just outside of Manhattan, rehearses its own destruction—both in practice, installing a “working” system that fails to work, and in the fantasy of Fighting the Flames. Within it, a miniature city, replicating the dream city. In their role as stunted other—having unlike their full size brethren, been relegated to rehearsing “false alarms” for example—the dwarf fire fighters turns out ready to go to work for real. And in defending their actual home, *what they manage to save is the faux fire station itself.*

Is this not the last straw, so to speak?! The only thing saved from the flames is the simulacrum of the mechanism of saving itself, the one thing that was to sacrifice itself to save the rest. It is too much, this reduction to nothing. Or rather, to almost nothing. If everything

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<sup>70</sup> Rem Koolhaas, *Delirious New York: a retroactive manifesto for Manhattan* (New York: Monacelli Press, 1994), 74.



was lost, that would at least have been something to console us. But to be left with precisely that? We have to laugh. But at what, the story? That it happened? Or is it that it actually happened, but as if it were a fantasy? (Fantasy, we could say, is that mode we recognize not, as we tend to assume, by its illogic and absurdity, but by its relentless, unfettered logic. We know we are awake, on the contrary, when things start making *less* sense, when the fire's devastation is a bit more random and capricious, when we remember to be surprised by things happening.) Isn't the problem here that the actual is too fantastic? *Too good to be true*, we say. We say it, of course, as a relief valve, to relieve the pressure when things get too hot, as a way of extricating ourselves, waking up. *Let the good (fantasy) and true (reality) be distinct*. A distinction we evoke when we get in over our heads, lest we keep looking.

### **Keep Looking: Forgetting, Vigilance, and Desire**

Can we fathom what is going on here, in this shimmering moment, or are we kept offshore by the heat? Somehow we have encountered this story of flames prematurely, or arrived too late, armed with nothing but a garden hose. At the very least, we shall have to return to this faux fire station. We shall have to let it haunt us. (It is as if it stands for the possibility of return itself, a precise and eerie remainder. *If one wanted to ensure a return... what? save at least the fire station? Save only the faux station?*) And yet, perhaps for the moment all we can do is stand by, taking in the burning scene, allowing it to sear into our working memory. *Perhaps we can remember.*

But what were we saying? Before we tried to mark the moment? (As if our attempt at orienting, blazing the path, was also a distraction.) Ah yes, the inversion of cities. But

something is nagging at us now, as if we can't remember why we are going on. Why were we talking about cities?

There would appear to be another strange inversion at work: we can remember only those things we have forgotten. When I say to myself, "remember that I put this book here," I am saying, I am about to forget this, to walk off and bring my attention elsewhere, crossing a threshold beyond which I cannot be sure that I will remember. How often (like the faux fire station?) do we remember only that, the precaution itself?! "I remember I put that book somewhere where I wouldn't forget it." This, in any case, is the risk, the elusive heart of memory itself. And so we prepare ourselves, knowing that the preparation can only be imperfect. Is that what Coney Island was? A place, perhaps, where we could imagine what the future of the city might be, but also a place where we could remind ourselves how flammable the dream was. Don't forget, it would say, over and over, its rides lulling passengers to sleep like clockwork, compressing cataclysmic time—the life and death of a city—into a day trip, and a day into a twenty minute ride.

That would be one thing: if we were trying to remember to be vigilant. We rehearse the disaster so that we can avert it. But the saving of the faux fire station suggests another possibility as well, that we will happily burn things if it allows us to look. As if what fascinates us is the fiery scene itself. We avert the disaster so that we can have it. Lilliputia hides our dreams in plain sight. A little paint, a little horror, a little person, suffices. Entertainment, even education, is enough to distract us from our *interest*. Perhaps that is the pivotal point: much more and it wouldn't work. The most outlandish dream requires the barest of distinctions. Keep everything close, just turn it a bit. Indeed, it is a city, visitors are quickly and pointedly told, that is inverted: up is down, and moral conventions are not so much suspended as

systematically inverted. “Promiscuity, homosexuality, nymphomania and so on are encouraged and flaunted: marriages collapse almost as soon as they are celebrated; 80 percent of newborn babies are illegitimate.”<sup>71</sup>

As if in symbiotic response, the nearby Incubator Building engages in its own fantasmatic reality as the first working hospital for premature babies. Watched over by the stork that crowns it, the crowds can in turn watch the almost motionless display of birth and progress, rescued from death by an extended gestation. Here (you will have to take their word for it), today, at this very moment, the slow time of a life is catching up to itself. It is, as the guidebook says, “a practical, educational life-saving station.”

Birth then too. Birth and death. A city, to repair itself, (to remind itself?), would concern itself with firestations and incubators. Poor timing, that is the threat. Barely enough time. “...marriages collapse almost as soon as they are celebrated...” Babies are born too soon and saved, or “illegitimate,”—a problem as well, of timing—and will never recover legitimacy. The “firemen” of Fighting the Flames will come in the nick of time. A real fire prevention system is put in place, but just misses its cue. It is as if birth and death are constantly heading one towards the other, splitting seconds. Averting sweeping disaster, be it rampant fire or perverse sexuality, is apparently a precision event in the city. Packed in, all it takes is one misstep.

Vigilance then. Or rather, again. That is the problem with perpetual vigilance: it is impossible to maintain. We are always catching ourselves nodding off, no matter how hard we train and drill. We could say even that vigilance is the activity that arises precisely from

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 49.

realizing this—a worried imperative that carries its own failure within it from the beginning.<sup>72</sup> Our very preparations add yet another layer that threatens to elude us: the fire hose that turns out not to be connected to the sea. In the random chaos of life, the generative proliferation that is Coney Island, it is so difficult to know what to be vigilant about. Again the thought occurs to us: what if we prefer to exhaust ourselves through vigilance so that we can finally be distracted enough to look? At what? We are hard pressed to admit how difficult it can be to look, to really look, at a newborn, for example. But are the large so fascinated by dwarfs? Isn't it rather that vigilance and the secret object of desire—which is not to be confused with the object of vigilance—form together? It is the very peculiarity of the desire that is of interest, the way it escapes our intentions. As if the one informs us of the other.

Which reminds us...

### **Education at the edge of the Sea?**

*“...a practical, educational life-saving station...”* It almost got lost in the tumbling layers: a working hospital in a fake city; an image of practical,<sup>73</sup> progressive science—machines picking up the slack of wombs—crowned by the folk image of a stork that bypasses the womb altogether; the “station” that shares a life-saving mission with that other station—one for when we are too

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<sup>72</sup> It is as much oriented to the future as the past. We stand watch, waiting for a possible event, because we are trying to remember what has happened. In the wake of 9/11 the slogan “We will never forget” blended a concern with the impending future, with the possibilities of vengeance and prevention. The task seemed to be to both foreclose the return of the event and to hold it open forever against the foreclosure of forgetting or resolution.

<sup>73</sup> This almost slips by as well. “Practical” compared to what? An argument for the effectiveness of this scientific intervention, surely. But in contrast to the practicalities of the usual flows of birth in the city, this is offered as an even more minimal correction. Science, just as much, as an organizational intervention: *let us gather them together in one place, with one system, a carefully controlled (eco)system for extending and protecting birth.*

small, the world too cold, and another for when things get too big, too hot. No, it is something else we almost missed, the slightest of additions, hiding in plain sight, couched in the edifying language of guidebooks. What is education doing here, in a playland by the sea? On the one hand, it seems to stick out, well, like a hospital for preemies at the beach. On the other hand, it is so commonplace that the trope could find itself into a guidebook, as if a vision of the city couldn't be complete without it. The quintessential guide, education is the way we learn to find our way. Education weaves through it all, so that we hardly notice. Indeed, we could say that Coney Island as a whole served as a kind of school for cities. We could even go on to take this at face value, assuming that we knew what those words meant. A kind of preemie incubator for possible cities, as Koolhaas would have it, sidestepping the question. If there is anything we should know by now it is what a school is, and what a city is.

So why have we found ourselves turning to Coney Island at all? If it were a school for cities, surely we have learned its lessons by now, relegating it to a kind of vestigial, nostalgic place, rather than the visionary testing ground of the future that it once was. An abandoned school is hardly a school. But this might be the most difficult lesson of Coney Island itself, the paradox that cleaves to it. Once more, even today, it will prove a battleground: threatening to be redeveloped into a modern wonderland, its dilapidated remnants will be defended as the proper spectacle itself, it's own inverted, slightly seedy truth. Coney Island, you cannot burn bright enough, or fall apart enough. Coney Island, where the bright future burns us down. Where we will forget, for a moment, that all of this has happened before. In a ride, a season, a generation. If only so we can nostalgically remember. Or throw ourselves off. Coney Island is a kind of fun house mirror, showing us a peculiar truth: that we are a bit funny looking, that everything changes with a shifting point of view, that a school is *also only a school by being*

*abandoned*, a kind of Hollywood ghost town, all façade, yet paradoxically teeming with actors, crew and stunt doubles.

Have we turned to Coney Island to *learn* once more what it means to live in cities? Or living in cities, are we plagued with the question of our own education, the intense pressure to sort something out? In the end, as here in the beginning, it might not be so easy to discern the difference. Birth and death, building and destruction, remembering and forgetting, education and... what?

If everything circles uncertainly round, can we think the opposite gesture of “education?” Ignorance, yes, of course. Innocence even? But if, as the saying goes, “ignorance is bliss,” what precisely are we saying? We never, it should be noted, quite seem to mean it. In this time and place<sup>74</sup> where the label has a kind of currency, we might be surprised to think that we have yet to really *think* about what the claim of “anti-intellectualism” entails. (Which might mean risking being stupid, and not in some innocent way.) If, since Freud at least, we cannot think forgetting without it appearing more active, essential even, we educators might need to confront our own need to pretend still that we think ignorance is a simple lack. A blank slate? In the half-willed distortions of the fun house mirror we catch ourselves thinking and talking—more than we might imagine—about a more threatening inverse of education, more its match, more than its match even. But even this is oddly comforting. We know the story: The dire straits of education.

It is as if, though, this disguises a deeper fear, a deeper difficulty: that this shadowy inverse of education may not just eclipse education, but disrupt our very sense of what

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<sup>74</sup> And we should begin to wonder if in fact this feeling that something is peculiar to “this time and place” is itself more common than we think. “Kids these days...” they always say.

education is. What if even that must be learned? Except that the hackneyed phrase “learning to learn” is too simplistic, recovers things too fast. There is a horror that clings to education.

(There, it has slipped out. Is that too absurd to say? Either it is too obvious: the panic that runs through the actions of parents, for example, or the discourse of politicians. Too obvious, though, in the sense of being all surface, simply “irrational parents” in need of a little perspective, politicians with their usual rhetoric in election year. We know better than to take it seriously. Either that or, amounting to the same thing, we simply point to what we all know: that education is hardly horrifying. It’s daily frustrations and victories are just that, daily things. More difficult—more shaming to the crass evocation of horror—is the vision of education as something that rises up above the daily, perhaps is even this rising itself. Education as a quietly sublime experience. The last place for horror. And yet, perhaps this formulation, this antimony, too should cause us pause. Even when we reasonably or sublimely protest, don’t we protest with a kind of urgency?<sup>75</sup> A kind of urgent need not to get riled. I’m not sure how you could make the case. Perhaps it would entail showing the deep affinity that education has with the hackneyed itself, with clichés of every sort. As if even the apparent object of desire were too troubling, so that we would prefer to settle for the banal double of it. Which brings us back to this funny phrase...)

“Learning to learn” appears to open a whole can of worms—the way learning eludes its apparent moment, challenging us to think learning beyond itself—but what if it is also a happy sign of our jaded distance, our preference for a self referential loop cut off from anything but

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<sup>75</sup> This would seem to be one of the essential components of the horror genre: that nobody (reasonable, and with authority) will believe you when you say they should be scared. The horror plot could be said to revolve around highlighting this inversion: the series of dire actions that needs to happen in order to show the fearful one to have clear-headed courage, and that the “reasonable” are the ones who are most actively horrified, most subject to the horrible.

its own doubling, rather than struggle with the loss it at least suggests? What is “jadedness,” in an educator, except a belated, peremptory defense against being traumatized? *Let’s go through the motions*. Which, we might say, is not precisely the same thing as “burn out,” in which the possible impossibility of cycling through is itself being felt. As traumatic as this is, we also have a whole apparatus for banalizing it, not the least of which is naming it.<sup>76</sup> It is itself something to be expected, like the trauma of “the first year.” Still too close to their dreams, the teacher has yet to figure out how to get a little jaded—maybe not in order to give the dreams up, but to protect them. In any case, we should not be surprised to find a close affinity between both *positive* and *negative* banalities, a kind of negotiation and attenuation of the horror of education.

If education is the very thing that comes in the nick of time, correcting for the discrepancies of life-as-usual that would, causing us to miss our step, send us spiraling down, it is hardly for all of that, bankable. Education, conceived this way, is itself a kind of disruptor, the introduction of an uncertain variability, a provocation, a jostled memory. And hence harder to distinguish from whatever we imagine has derailed things in the first place. The story of education becomes the clarification of this role, extricating itself from messy interpretations, false contenders. Education: the proper deviant.

What would it take to be troubled by this? First, we might have to follow this story closely, going deeper into the repetitions of education, the stories we repeat of it.

Paradoxically, the closer we can follow them, the more something else is introduced. There is

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<sup>76</sup> We would also have to think the ways in which naming is a collective act, bringing us closer against the storm. More seasoned teachers will often commiserate with newer teachers, in a kind of initiation by fire, “teaching how to teach” we might say, but more importantly finding a kind of belonging: *see, we are all in this together*.



something disconcerting about becoming aware of a repetition, as if one is being put on. But even this is perhaps only problematic because of the loss that it entails: to become aware of the repetition is to risk not being able to repeat it.<sup>77</sup> But if we are to glean anything from Coney Island it is that this is not the story's first time around the block. Surely it knows something of trouble, real and imagined. So as we follow the repetitions we should begin to see that the very notion of disrupting cycles, of finding ways to be troubled by them, digging deeper in order to finally emerge, is itself part of the repetition. We are perhaps getting closer to being able to formulate a working hypothesis, if only as a kind of speculation on the horizon. Something to set sail towards. Could it be that just as the trials and tribulations of Coney Island begin to teach us something about cities and repetitions, that this presence of an educational imperative *within* Coney Island will turn out not to be accidental? If we invert things, beginning from education, will we discover in turn a city by the sea? It is hard not to be haunted by a memory of such things already. But let us not be too quick.

*To begin from education...* What would that entail? The word itself only takes us only so far, back of course, to the Latin: *e-ducare*. To bring up, nourish or raise. A beginning of (assisting) beginnings? (We should feel the trouble brewing.) One begins by not going

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<sup>77</sup> In much the way that Wiley E. Coyote, running off a cliff, will not plummet until he looks down. This is the lesson of the Judas character in *The Matrix*. He will willingly give up his position of knowing, outside of the matrix, and betray that world, in exchange for being placed back within the story *without knowing it*. The judgment of being selfish would, selfishly never reach his own ears. The true selfishness is not to be aware of one's self. We could, however, read this the other way around: that he would willingly sacrifice himself, his own sense of self, in order to fix the discrepancy of this alternate, impoverished space, to close it for others. The more difficult inverted interpretation of the Judas story, however, would be to imagine that Judas himself is the sacrifice, made by his colleagues in order to introduce a workable discrepancy between worlds. In order to establish the perception of moving off of a matrix we must posit someone willing to "return" to it, closing off the marks of entry to cycle entirely within it. Judas' punishment is paradoxically to be innocent. In the way, for example that positing animals as "mindless" allows for the creation of the "human." We might argue that something like this happens within the discourse of education itself. To show it, we might have to run the risk of following things too closely, too mindlessly.

anywhere but by growing in place. But the etymology is complicated, doubling by way of a homonym: *e-ducere*. This too is a common-place: education is a kind of drawing, guiding or leading out. One begins by leaving. Are we looking for a place from which we could begin to draw things out? Or a kind of beginning to drawing out itself? Presented with two different sources, each with their own distinct senses of education (*up* or *out*), their very linkage becomes a sign of the elusive indeterminacy of education, its role as difference itself.<sup>78</sup> But this is precisely the problem: how to read this difference? Education: the drawing out of difference, or the homonymic collapse of difference? This is the impossible tension. Shall we say that this is the beauty of it, or the horror? If it draws us anywhere it is into a mess, a knot of terms and usages that are themselves tied up with bindings and releasings, ups and downs, ins and outs.

*To draw out* or *bring up*, but from what? From ignorance, the implication always seems to be. Perhaps, but then where is that? Searching for origins we find more layers. In usage *ēducāre/ēducēre* might apply to the act of midwifery just as much as to the putting to sea of a ship. One can be drawn up before the courts, led to one's punishment, or sent out, bearing dictates to the provinces.

This is the difficulty of going back that etymology only highlights. Seeming to bring us back to an originary sense, roots are tangled things. That said, can we avoid it? The sailor on land is called to the sea, and at sea dreams of ports. If we allow our memory to bring us back to another city by the sea, traveling long and far, around the world, and to another time, we

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<sup>78</sup> We might recall here Derrida's treatment of a similar scenario, revolving around a not unrelated theme. *Différance*, a created homonym with *différence*, will suggest this impossible interplay and difference that hovers around the question of memory, deferral and reconstruction. Jacques Derrida, "Différance," in *Margins of philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982).

should not be surprised if we haven't gotten very far, finding yet another city within a city within a city...

### **On the Shores of Education**

But let us approach carefully. At the very least we should realize that the shores can be approached from at least two directions. A port—if that is what we are looking for—is what it is precisely because it is always being navigated in both directions. It is either the place where the sea “meets” the land, a kind of skin or boundary in which two irreconcilable zones nevertheless interact: merchant fleets will come in, unload and head back to sea, while a city will operate as a kind of mirror image, goods being washed inland and upwards in a flow of waves and tides. But with the two realms turning around and bouncing off the shore itself. But the shore is also a kind of threshold or transitional space. The port is the chaotic place where people and things are always passing through, changing modes, exchanging. For the port to do its work things must move in multiple directions simultaneously. So at the very least, we should, as anyone who visits a port knows, be on our guard.

Jacques Rancière's first foray in his book, *On the Shores of Politics*, brings us right up to the difficulty, while perhaps not realizing the complexity, as if to point it out is enough to pass through:

To speak of the boundaries of the political realm would seem to evoke no precise or current reality. Yet legend invariably has the political begin at one boundary, be it the Tiber or the Neva, and end up at another, be it Syracuse or the Kolyma: riverbanks of foundation, island shores of refoundation, abysses of

horror or ruin. There must surely be something of the essence in this landscape for politics to be so stubbornly represented within it.<sup>79</sup>

To begin with, we should note the elusiveness of boundaries, the way they represent a kind of failure of evocation, a difficulty speaking, a lack of precision, as if something like the political seeps everywhere, or is currently nowhere. This is the unspoken difficulty that haunts Ellsworth's claim, in her book *Places of Learning*, when she (quite rightly) suggests, "Rather we might begin to think of pedagogical volition as a simultaneity of interfering and resonating desires distributed *across the social body*—across different people, practices, and disciplines such as art, performance, architecture, museum exhibition, and public events." Education exceeds the boundaries we set for it, running across the social body. Shouldn't we, for example see the unsettling way in which Rancière's nascent *political* topology maps onto or colludes with "the educational realm" as well? Haven't we discovered this in Coney Island already? If boundaries are elusive, they nevertheless also have names and are distinct from each other and whatever came before. Points of departure: Tiber, Neva. Rancière quickly insists: the boundaries are nevertheless stubbornly precise. Stubbornly, so that we see them even as they cross over into Ellsworth's attempts to spread education across the social body itself. If pedagogy runs across difference, it also generates differences—"resonating," yes, but also "interfering." The more we try to escape its bounds the more they show themselves, in the list of possible new sites, for example. If we rightly see pedagogy run through a museum exhibition, art, or a public event, more troubling would be to ask what is not on this list, what is still off the shores? (Not yet being colonized?)

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<sup>79</sup> Jacques Rancière, *On the shores of politics* (London: Verso, 2007), 1.

There is, thus, a deeper challenge hidden in these beginnings: how does one approach the already ambivalent topology of approach itself? How does one set out for the realm of politics, or of education, especially when they disconcertingly begin to overlap? To say that this is already a political gesture, already a mode of learning, tells us nothing we do not already know. The elusive itself is put in its place. Rancière wastes no time showing the scope of this gesture:

[Philosophy's] claims in respect to politics can be readily summed up as an imperative: to shield politics from the perils that are immanent to it, it has to be hauled up on to dry land, set down on terra firma. The whole political project of Platonism can be conceived as an anti-maritime polemic. The *Gorgias* insists on this: Athens has a disease that comes from its port, from the predominance of maritime enterprise governed entirely by profit and survival. Empirical politics, that is to say the fact of democracy, is identified with the maritime sovereignty of the lust for possession, which sails the seas doubly threatened by the buffeting of the waves and the brutality of the sailors. The great beast of the populace, the democratic assembly of the imperialist city, can be represented as a trireme of drunken sailors. In order to save politics it must be pulled aground among the shepherds.<sup>80</sup>

What perhaps eludes Rancière is the way in which this philosophical gesture itself replicates one of the directions of travel, from sea to shore. Socrates is doing nothing more than insisting that the philosophical follow the political: head up from the Tiber. If philosophy attempts to set politics on solid ground, it is by staying close to legend.

We should, however, at the risk of following Rancière too long, let him bring us through the full scene. (Or is it a gesture? And what hangs on the difference between a scene, a gesture, or a journey?)

In the first place, it is a matter of a *mise-en-scène*, of shifting images around: cave and mountain instead of sea and land. Before taking us down into the famous cave, Socrates tells us a lot about triremes, incorrigible sailors and helpless pilots. Entering the cave we bid farewell to this fatal and seductive seascape.

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

The Cave is the sea transposed beneath the earth, bereft of its sparkling glamour; enclosure instead of open sea, men in chains instead of rows of oarsmen, the dullness of shadows on the wall instead of light reflected on waves. The procedure whereby the prisoner is released and offered conversion is preceded by another, by that first metaphoric act which consists in burying the sea, drying it up, stripping it of its reflections and changing their very nature. In response to these assaults we know, however, that the sea will take its revenge. For the paradox of the undertaking is that hauling politics onto the solid ground of knowledge and courage entails a return to the isles of refoundation; it means crossing the sea once more and surrendering the shepherds' resurrected city to the whims of tides and mariners.<sup>81</sup>

No doubt. And yet, could it be that what characterizes Platonism is not this blindness to revenge and return, but the way in which it puts this suppression to use. Plato knows well enough that things come around. It is a question of spin. What do we make of this change of course, this returning? What is the spin that we give to the realization that our forays return?

We might recall Borges' "The Circular Ruin" here, which sets out thus:

No one saw him disembark in the unanimous night, no one saw the bamboo canoe sinking into the sacred mud, but within a few days no one was unaware that the silent man came from the South and that his home was one of the infinite villages upstream, on the violent mountainside, where the Zend tongue is not contaminated with Greek and where leprosy is infrequent. The truth is that the obscure man kissed the mud, came up the bank without pushing aside the brambles which dilacerated his flesh, and dragged himself, nauseous and bloodstained, to the circular enclosure....He knew that this temple was the place required by his invincible purpose; he knew that, downstream, the incessant trees had not managed to choke the ruins of another propitious temple.<sup>82</sup>

A sufficiently choked ruin, a singular journey and purpose, downstream and up from the banks of the river. His task, to dream a man and "insert him into reality." But the vector will not stay straight. At first, dialectic:

The stranger dreamt that he was in the center of a circular amphitheater which in some way was the burned temple: clouds of silent students filled the gradins;

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>82</sup> Jorge Luis Borges, *Labyrinths; selected stories & other writings* (New York,: New Directions, 1964), 45.

the faces of the last ones hung many centuries away and at a cosmic height...The man was lecturing them on anatomy, cosmography, magic; the countenances listened with eagerness and strove to respond with understanding, as if they divined the importance of the examination which would redeem one of them from his state of vain appearance and interpolate him into the world of reality.”<sup>83</sup>

*One of them...* The circle is a test, an array, a filter, a momentary blockage in the straight line. One makes it through. “He was not long disconcerted by his companions’ sudden elimination...Nevertheless catastrophe ensued.” The dream is lost, afternoon mistaken for dawn, the jungle turns into a desert. He begins again, realizing that initial failure was inevitable. This time, materialism, anti-hallucination: ignore dreams, build a body one organ at a time, carefully over years. And yet, the dream simply goes underground: “Inwardly, it pained him to be separated from the boy. Under the pretext of pedagogical necessity, each day he prolonged the hours he dedicated to his dreams.” Eventually though, he sends his “son” to the temple downstream where he becomes a man of magic, only after making him forget his apprenticeship, “so that he would never know he was a phantom,” a projection of another man’s dreams. The story ends with the old man “dying,” although rather than dying he comes to a realization. The story ends: “With relief, with humiliation, with terror, he understood that he too was a mere appearance, dreamt by another.”

We should simply note several aspects of this story of the circular ruins. The first is that it takes place within a displaced series of narratives. Told in the third person by a mysterious narrator who speaks of a long line of other narrators, we also find within the story the passing on of stories by vaguely described locals.

After some time, which some narrators of his story prefer to compute in years and others in lustra [we should also note this uncertain fluctuation in time

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 46.

itself], he was awakened one midnight by two boatmen; he could not see their faces, but they told him of a magic man in a temple of the North.

The story itself winds its way back up the river. It spreads in the jungle itself. “No one saw him...but within a few days no one was unaware that the silent man came from the South.” The second thing to note is this displacement down river, projecting an infinite number of villages upstream. The repetition, of father and son, phantom to phantom, each dreaming the next, both repeats itself and spreads itself out along a line that is mysterious to itself. Only on the threshold of death does the revelation come of a larger cycle and continuity and its revealing, humiliating, terrifying implication of a repetition. So when we asked earlier about what the spin is that we give to the realization that our forays return, we should see it in this light. It is not simply a question of “spin” as a kind of knowing manipulation, although that resides within the story as well, but the way in which the turns of the story themselves potentially send us spinning. What are we to make of it? We get an inkling of a repetition, a larger story, that we have been ourselves enacting, “a mere appearance, dreamt by another.” Borges hints, though, at a more disconcerting repetition, with his layering of stories. Just as the faces of boatmen bearing news cannot be seen, and our narrator himself remains nameless, we would be foolish to imagine that we—you and I—are sitting at a safe distance above the river, outside of the eddies of time, securely nowhere. The story spins up, giving us a sense that we can speak of this infinite ritual, of a kind of Borgesian cleverness even. But if we allow it, it can unsettle, even horrify us.

The beautiful efficiency of a toy top, seemingly able to revolve around its axis forever, also generates, with the slightest of variations off of this access, the most random seeming of circlings, a paroxysm of arcing (im)balance. Or we might also think of a Slinky: the coils that



stack and repeat so perfectly, but when stretched out create an oscillating wave, coils sending pulsations down a river; or flipping end over end down stairs, ever changing and yet strictly uniform, an error of placement in the toss the most likely culprit if it doesn't keep going. Cleverness, return, leave us all the more perplexed by the discrepancy. The magician is both relieved and horrified, perhaps at the same thought—not that all of this was a clockwork illusion, but at the more ambiguous sense that it both does and does not return fully. Which aspect relieved, and which horrified? This would be the wrong question.

Coming ashore, then, is not so simple as it seems. We find temples repeating temples, and in the gap any number of trials at pedagogy. We see that the flow of the river is itself not without its cycles that haunt and traverse it, or find their way back up stream, like forgotten dreams returning.

### **A Cautionary Tale of Cities and Education to End all Tales**

Fancying himself both a gadfly and a bit of a midwife, Socrates tells the story of another city within and beneath the city. A story of education and “the lack of education.”<sup>84</sup> And here too everything is inverted, and his captors turn out to be prisoners, facing the wrong direction, threatening a complicated delivery. The cave, of course, is the underworld, as John Sallis points out.<sup>85</sup> The structure of *The Republic*<sup>86</sup> is woven around downgoings within downgoings.

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<sup>84</sup> παιδείας and ἀπαιδευσίας

<sup>85</sup> Sallis, *Being and logos : reading the Platonic dialogues*.

<sup>86</sup> This title circles round to us by way of Cicero's Latin translation, its oddity masked by tradition. The Greek word is *politeia*, and as Allen Bloom, in a footnote to his translation of the work, lays it out, while tying his own hands on the matter of the title, “the polis is the city.” Rather than simplifying the matter of how the Greek conception of a city differs from ours today, causing translators to want to add

Plato wastes no time establishing more precisely the specificity of the dramatic scene, identified by name in the first words of the dialogue: “I went down to the Piraeus...” Hell is the lower city, the Piraeus, the port of Athens. But if the lower city is hell, we should be careful with our images of brimstone, thinking that we have, with Sallis, finally caught Socrates’ drift. For what is “hell” if not this inversion itself, the fatal flaw that draws us in, the thing that horrifies us? Hell, it turns out, is just a scary part of the city. One goes down to see the torch races, the city in flames, the horror of the helpless preemie, before returning home.

Glaucon is surely right, this is a strange story. Setting out to tell a story of “education and the lack of education” Socrates tells us a story of downgoing: a stripped down version of the way in which the city itself enacts a mythic ritual of descent. An educational tale both repeating and faithfully recounting the tales the city tells itself and at the same time introducing an eerie difference. A tale—the first proper tale?—of education, also appears to be its last, a story of messy tales being the very thing from which we must emerge. The tale of a barely distinguishable difference, an inversion, turning everything on its head: what seems most real is not, and what is most real is the remainder. Socrates is the quintessential Greek, insisting on the positivity of education [παιδείας] over its shadowy lack [ἀπαιδευσίας]. But it is also as if he is the turning point between this and the Roman inverse, showing that education involves an extrication, a stripping away of the specificity of the tales of the city by following

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a corrective, the “city-state”, instead such a translation returns us to a complex set of resonances, not the least of which is with politicians and citizens (polites). It is worth considering the possibility that “tradition” in this tale of translations is less the accumulated history of usage, and instead speaks to a kind of specific yet elusive resistance that could perhaps only be felt by imagining the discomfort, either our own or an imagined other, if we called the dialogue “The City.” What is the unease? Is it that we simply prefer a continuity and familiarity across the cyclic layers of translation, or is it that this particular, Latin, veering serves to correct a more disconcerting course, neatly sidestepping the complexity of the polis?

them precisely in their place, (to the hair-splitting letter of the law, we might say: *ēducāre/ēducēre*) so that the ephemeral remainder is drawn out.

Socratic irony, no doubt. But this might serve to mask the essential turning and doubling, the rigor of it.<sup>87</sup> In order to tell this bare and revealing story of education, Socrates must get his hands dirty, recounting strange stories of downgoing while a captive in the lower city. Irony itself depends on this tragic gesture: the low seriousness of irony. Tragic, yes. Not because he found himself slumming, nor because he was put to death for doing so, at the hands of the ignorant, for challenging the old stories the city told of itself—to leave them behind, to teach us something, *ēducēre*. (But which is it, were we taught, or were we taught what being taught is? Did he die for trying to teach, or did he teach us what dying is? In good Socratic fashion, even this knowledge is not his, but is drawn out of us.) But if this is not tragic, (and terribly ironic) then what is? But that is precisely the point. Tragedy is the classic story of the closing of the gap. Tragic, then, in this sense: that Socrates pushed to the rigorous letter the mechanisms of tragedy, the story-line everyone knows. A series of elements and scenes arranged just so. Socrates dies a structural death, the death of tragedy.

We should give pause, though. Are things not getting too much again? Are we not falling for this conflation of fantasy and reality? A little Socratic irony would help us keep things in perspective, keep us from getting sucked in. Instead, looking for education, and

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<sup>87</sup> Here too, we find a difficult doubling and difference. Should we recognize in Socratic irony, a more rigorous line, guided by the hand of Plato: less charming and disarming the more Plato tries to speak for his friend. Is Platonism what happens when you try to speak up for an ironist? But this too presupposes we know the order of things, a way of teasing out the voice of Socrates from his zealous scribe. Is this not also an effect of the genre: shifting from innocence to jadedness, but also positioning jadedness as the protector of innocence?

turning to one of the great thinkers and series of texts of history, we find ourselves talking about death and tragedy. How do we keep getting led morbidly astray?

Is this not, however, precisely Socrates' situation? He sets out to tell the story, and following it ever so closely, is accused of straying. We have simply been following along, although it is perhaps not an aptitude for precision that keeps our nose to the tracks, but the wide downward groove itself. (Should we have to read Socrates bewilderments and protestations of ignorance more genuinely?!) In any case irony works by way of this minimal difference. *Maybe I am sincere*. Indeed, the more the irony is over the top, the closer it has to bring people together, while also barely separating them: *We both know this is too much. Do you follow me?* Socrates is famous for this gesture: *have we gotten someplace absurd? Why then it is you that have brought us here? I have been staying close*. Together but estranged, this is the bare inversion of the formal staging of Tragedy that Socrates brings about over the course of the dialogue: by the time we arrive at the cave, we are reduced to *two actors, watching and discussing the silent chorus*.

But these are not the only stories the city tells of itself, and as in Coney Island, we find uplifting stories of birth. Athena, in contrast to the port city's celebration of Bendis, drives the upper city—Athens itself, in its idealized glory. But her credentials are precisely having been born from the fire of the inner city. The opposite of a preemie, she arrives fully grown, fully armored, and right side up, from a cleft in Zeus' forehead. *To karenon*: head, mountain peak, Mount Olympus even, the word seemingly indicates the very opposite of the underworld.<sup>88</sup> An

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<sup>88</sup> “Like Ishtar's ascent, Athena's is an ascent from the netherworld. This is indicated symbolically in the motif of Zeus' head as the place from which she emerges. The word used for Zeus' head, τὸ κάρηνον, also means ‘mountain peak’. This usage can be seen, for instance, in the *Iliad*, 1.44 and 8.12, where it refers to the peaks of Olympos: οὐλυμπος κάρηνα, ‘the pinnacles of Olympos’. [...] In Mesopotamia, the

immaculate conception, neutralizing even the mother. This is true, but adequate only if one forgets the rigorous schedule of downgoing, the clockwork disaster of Fighting the Flames. One goes up to go down, out to return, extinguishes to burn. The mountains are also the land of the setting sun, the path of descent. Athena, in her perfect birth, arrives victorious over the underworld/outer-city/mountain/forehead, to take her place in the center of Athens.

It is, to indicate the elusive obvious, a proto-educational narrative. Zeus had eaten Metis—Thought herself—having been forewarned that she would threaten his power. Metis set to work within Zeus, crafting Athena’s armor, until the clamor causes such a headache that Zeus will submit to the ax. Athena, goddess of wisdom in her mature glory, steps out. She will become Zeus’ favorite. The threatening power of engendering thought, put to work on the inside, is brought under civilized control.

But if it is a shocking and singular birth that ensures her place, it is only on condition that the show must go on. And, true to form, the story of her birth and ascent is carved in the Parthenon, surrounded by scenes of disaster. The singular event will be repeated over and over, in an attempt to ensure victory. Each year, with the seasons, the city will repeat the drama, sending its young women, coming of age, on a sacred pilgrimage to the very limits of the polis, marked by the mountains. It is a journey of risk and downgoing, so that they may return bringing prosperity once again to the city. Their role done, they recede into silence and the domestic interior.

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mountain or mountains signify the netherworld in iconography and in myth, and in the hymn to Apollo the mountain is present in the scene of the birth/ascent of Apollo from within the earth, as it is in the birth scene of Zeus Kretagenes, where the birth and ascent from within the earth are explicit.” Penglase, *Greek myths and Mesopotamia: parallels and influence in the Homeric hymns and Hesiod*, 232.

Sacrifice and blessing, the ritual enactment of a disaster narrowly averted is a sign of the harmonious future that will come. It is true that we seem to be working backwards in time, but the point here is not to uncover the originary *meaning* of these urban, educational, birth stories enacting a ritual, sacrificial practice. If anything, the dream of an origin, a natural state *prior* to the disaster, is *part* of the drama. Such speculations of an originary state merely serve the narrative function of marking both an uncivilized departure point (the barbaric hell on the other side of the mountains), as well as a future Eden (an educated utopia freed from the need for a political compromise/solution to the barbarism within the gates.) The dream of emergence and new birth is already sacrificial and cyclical: the beginning is no beginning, the end is no end.

Instead, one might put the thesis thus: we repeat ourselves because we repeat ourselves. Plato's *Republic* is not so much by turns optimistic and pessimistic, raising up the ideal city before collapsing it into hell, as it is essentially repetitive. Its structural rise and fall is the bare minimum by which it can return to the beginning, so as to repeat again. It is properly read in the round, its last page abutted to its first, a nightly journey. Socrates has talked his way through the night, and recounts the tale in the morning: "I went down to the Piraeus yesterday...." Far from being a singular book, its first telling is already doubled, falling closely on its own heels without a breath. One, of course, must *teach* the *Republic* as if it matters, as if were in danger of falling into the river of Lethe, of forgetting, with which the dialogue ends, as if we must take the time to go back. This is the urgency of the leisure that is philosophy. This is how we learn to return to it, how Plato himself taught us to think of it, as if it were on the brink of loss. If we turn to it here, it is for the opposite reason: that we have barely learned to see the grip this cycle has on us, how closely we come back, time and again. It

is a story of fidelity, of a particular path marked by friendship over time. Socrates ends his own tale by closing the circle of another:

And thus, Glaucon, a tale was saved and not lost; and it could save us, if we were persuaded by it, and we shall make a good crossing of the river of Lethe and not defile our soul. If we are persuaded by me...we shall always keep to the upper road and practice justice and prudence in every way so that we shall be friends to ourselves and the gods, both while we remain here and when we reap the rewards for it. (621b-c)

In other words: in order to repeat the story, we must tell it in such a way that it brings us back to where we are; in order to return, we must repeat it as faithfully as possible. The city must be burned to be saved. But it must be saved in order to return us, once again to the flashpoint.

The lesson for the set designer is simple. Things cannot be “saved” any which way. The story must be told in such a way that everything returns to its mark. One does not improvise Fighting the Flames. Deviation from the script is a constant threat. As Coney Island attests, it is only an overturned bucket, a sloppy janitor, (or an unruly cow in the lore of Chicago), that will set it ablaze “for real.” And even here the story recuperates itself, almost as if we go to the great lengths of rebuilding the city itself to ensure the life of the narrative.<sup>89</sup> This is the true

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<sup>89</sup> One is tempted to say that the slow speed of rebuilding in New Orleans is testament to its status as a city without upper city, the port city of Piraeus minus any Athens. This is the ethical, liberal outrage: we do not aid them because it is clear that we do not care to aid them. This reading would be easily supported by contrasting it with the up swell of support and solidarity with that other new city, New York, after 9/11. But, is it not more difficult than that: how one would determine the proper speed of rejuvenation in New Orleans? The proper extent of one’s outrage at its delay, itself depends on this narrative of repetition. How urgently do we need to retell the story? To move too fast and too well in rebuilding is to risk destroying what is properly “New Orleans” even more deftly than the waters. Its spectacular fallen status predates the disaster. And yet to not respond fast enough is to risk giving up on the story of the fall itself. What is America to do without the spectacle of a fallen city? How long must we be confronted with the devastating image of a city that has exceeded its role as joyful fallen excess itself? The scary thought is that we are not so much confronted with a true tragedy that threatens to derail the repetition of the narrative, as much as we may discover that it is the potential failure to reset and repeat that registers for us as truly tragic. Is this not the same

scope of repetition, it constantly rehearses its own breakdown. Contrary to the apparent message of this educational drama, schools do not prepare us for the difficulty of the real world. Instead the firefighter trains so that when “the real” fire breaks out, it will only be another rehearsal. It is the rehearsal itself that is most real. We repeat ourselves because we repeat ourselves.

### **Heroism, the Terror of Boredom, and the Zombie Apocalypse**

Even this simple formulation of the thesis bears repeating differently. And it is this, perhaps, that truly drives the repetition, its endless fascination, keeping us from dying of boredom. That is—repeat after me—we repeat *ourselves*. It is in the act of repeating that we sacrifice our individuality in the name of a collective “we.” This is not to be mistaken for a critique of social conservatism or even collectivism. One is not born as an individual by refusing to die for the city. The individual does not predate the city, but emerges from it. American individuality is ideally served by the factory system of education, endlessly refreshing it. Nor is Socrates’ death the courageous act of refuting the powers that be to die as a free, educated, subject. Instead he says “I” in the name of Athens, reenacting the drama of Athena herself. This is what makes it a foundational act of creation—the birth of philosophy as education proper, of an “I” speaking for a collective “we”—rather than a tragic political defeat, or even just the death of yet another criminal. There is no birth without sacrifice; the sentence could not have been otherwise.

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dilemma that haunts affirmative action in education? To take it is a step to equalizing the footing, and yet the act of taking it affirms the inequality, the supplemental nature of having to accept “affirmation” that drives the educational cycle of disparity.



This should not be mistaken for fatalism; it is merely the logic of downgoing. Whether one tells the story as a progressive or a conservative, as Socrates or his accuser, the story culminates and repeats only with sacrifice. Socrates choose to tell the story of himself such that no proper Athenian could deny its logical and proper outcome. It is the story of the goddess herself. They, like us, know it by heart.

However, we should note two things, having fallen for evoking Socrates' trial and death, that might nevertheless prove essential for our thesis. One is that, as in the inverted logic of the dwarf city, everything is reorganized. The educators deceive, the captors are prisoners, the supreme sacrifice of descending to be put to death by the masses results not in the guilt of the accused but of the accusers, and death turns out to be a reward. Without being hyperbolic, casting too far outside the circle, one cannot help but speculate that the perverse inverted logic that Slavoj Žižek points out in the perpetrators of the Holocaust also holds for this story of urban education: "It causes me more intense suffering than you can know to see you suffer so." It is perhaps this which allows for the story to cycle through and repeat rather than abort right there; because it turns out it is the guards who suffer, and willingly choose to do so as an act of sacrifice in the name of a higher good.

One could see it recently in coverage of Guantanamo: a young guard complains to the news camera that her friends, family, the camera itself, do not seem to understand. She goes on to list precisely three things that remain misunderstood: how hard it is; that she has no ill will to the prisoners; and that she chooses to do her duty as a prison guard in the name of freedom. This young woman has gone to the virtual border of her country, a place neither US nor not US, in sacrifice. We have no reason to disbelieve her on any count, thus challenging us in a way that the Nazi scenario cannot. In Hannah Arendt's inversion—showing, where we

wished to find monsters, vacuous *bureaucratic efficiency*—we discover *the* banality of evil: the horror of the lacuna of the loss of horror itself. Is this not the true horror of the situation: that we share with Eichmann this fundamental condition, a failure to be horrified? In the face of the devastation, destruction and loss of the Holocaust, its *missingness*, its irrecoverability, Arendt thus locates Eichmann's proper crime. He is guilty of confronting us with the elusiveness of horror, our need to re-stage it, recover it.

But does not this young guard, sent to Guantanamo, force us to conceive, beneath banality, a deeper inversion: the sincerely perplexed goodwill and self-sacrifice of evil. Could it be that our failure is not to care, to respond, to *find* our horror? Apathy calls for perpetual vigilance to combat it. But what if perpetual vigilance, in the sacrifice and toll that it takes on us, leads not to apathy but thoughtful action? *Let us do what is right*. Guantanamo would stand for the refusal to do nothing. It is not that this guard is empty or banal, nor even that she is misguided in her allegiance, but that she is actively constructing a sense of self and humanity and acting on it. Thoughtfully persevering, even in the face of opposition. *You do not understand: it is hard; I mean well; I do this not for myself but for others*. This is the uncomfortable scenario that we would prefer to put on trial at a distance rather than confront. It would be this challenge of goodwill that would keep the link between concentration camp and urban school from being inconceivable. We are confronted with our desire to measure our losses against our hopes. It would be easier say that if urban education is a battleground, a potential horror, it is one fought against the damage itself, in the name of life. "No Child Left Behind" shares the same logic learned from inconceivable loss in massive wars: whatever happens be on the side of self-sacrifice and goodwill. The modern war is a war on *terror* itself. Having felt the elusiveness of damage and loss in the modern world, the way in which loss *disappears*, the

temptation is to ask only that we not feel terror. The lack of which, we can discover, is something akin to terrifying.

Elizabeth Ellsworth, in her book on the places and positions of education, recounts the awkward trauma of her own schooling. It is oddly inverted; traumatic for being oppressively banal. Or perhaps the trauma is in not being able to properly recount anything other than that.

It's taken a long time to begin to find a way to explain to myself and to others what I mean when I say that my memories of school are "bad" ones. I had no vocabulary for speaking about and back to the slippery, indirect, and intricate workings of power in the student-teacher relations that I experienced. My grade and high school days weren't dramatically abusive or oppressive. I didn't have particularly mean-spirited teachers, and the schools that I went to were relatively clean, safe, orderly, and integrated into their community. [...] The workings of power in my school were elusive, traditional, taken for granted, well-intentioned, commonsensical, even unconscious.<sup>90</sup>

In a way, we might say that now, as an adult, she shares the dilemma of the prison guard from Guantanamo. Faced with "real" trauma, injustice, and inequality, who can say—who would be willing to hear—the unsettling trauma of not being... what? Inspired? Traumatized? She was, it turns out, just fine (she finds herself reduced to saying.)

How are we to think this doubling? That is, the very real persecutions, racisms, and injustices that run, like a kind of silent scream, through the implementation of education, somehow find themselves to have a ghostly double. Its victims share something in common with those who are not singled out covertly or overtly by the systems of power, who are "just fine"—for both the punishment appears to be the same: there is to be no trauma—Zero

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<sup>90</sup> Elizabeth Ann Ellsworth, *Teaching positions: difference, pedagogy, and the power of address* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1997), 2.

tolerance. The trauma of schooling is perceived only in the draconian or nebulous enforcement insisting, through punishments and merits, that nothing happen.<sup>91</sup>

We could as easily include the teachers and staff amongst the afflicted. But have we just, then, stripped trauma of its characteristics, finding it everywhere, even in its lack? This is a danger. But it also signals, perhaps, a kind of elusiveness of trauma, or even of death itself.

Žižek quotes Catherine Malibou in his essay, “Descartes and the Post-Traumatic Subject”:

These figures [of death in life] are “not so much figures of those who want to die as figures of those who are already dead, or, rather, to put it in a strange and terrible grammatical twist, who have already been dead, who ‘experienced’ death.”<sup>92</sup>

But what does this mean? Re-framing it through the somewhat mindlessly theorized genre of zombie movies we could postulate it is not that the undead trouble us because they are mindless, but because they frighteningly remind us that we can experience mindlessness, that we are, survivors and zombies alike, somehow mindful of it. Put the other way around, Žižek writes, “The properly philosophical dimension of the study of post-traumatic subject resides in this recognition that what appears as the brutal destruction of the subject’s very (narrative) substantial identity is the moment of its birth.”<sup>93</sup> The post-traumatic subject is not the same (now traumatized) person they were before. They are born out of the assemblages of the fractured self.

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<sup>91</sup> The insistence that everything return full circle, only seems to intensify what happens in the gap. Eruptions like the school killing at Columbine are the most sensational version of a break in the cycle, because they threaten our sense that nothing is supposed to happen at school, which in turn call for vigilance. But the very measures that are put in place to ensure a smooth return, metal detectors in schools, for example, as a kind of anti-event, themselves serve as intensive points.

<sup>92</sup> Slavoj Žižek, “Descartes and the Post-Traumatic Subject,” *Filozofski vestnik* XXIX, no. 2 (2008): 26.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*

The continuous fear and activity of the zombie movie—the constant effort to not become a zombie—is not what it seems. Displacing mindlessness onto those around them, (and ironically authorizing the most mindless violence against them), the survivor does not fight for life or for humanity, but to silence the traumatic birth of others and defend against change. This is the essential conservatism of the genre, masked as it is by a critique of mass consumption. Evan Calder Williams is ruthless on the matter:

These readings about the “real” content of zombies are limited because they aren’t really readings: they just describe what happens in the films. To say that the ending of *Night of the Living Dead*, with the “accidental” murder of an African-American man by the white redneck zombie hunting mob, is largely about race relations is just to say that you’ve watched the movie all the way through. [...] Of real concern is the symptomatic content: the effects and sets of meanings whose sources cannot be found in the film “trying to say something” about social issues.<sup>94</sup>

This diagnosis might coil around to the “reading” of school as well, and in particular of recent documentaries such as *Waiting for Superman*. It is this banality at the level of the real that can allow someone like Diane Ravitch to “flip flop” so famously on Charter Schooling in the aptly titled (and swiped) *The Death and Life of the Great American School System*.<sup>95</sup> Indeed it is the consistency of readings between progressives and reformists that keeps them spinning around. As Williams argues, and we should note his spatial language, this is the mere “surface

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<sup>94</sup> Evan Calder Williams, *Combined and uneven apocalypse* (Winchester: Zero Books, 2010), 78-9.

<sup>95</sup> Diane Ravitch, *The death and life of the great American school system: how testing and choice are undermining education* (New York: Basic Books, 2011). What we see is that the real leverage of an unforced confession is in reinforcing a more essential truth. Ravitch’s beef with the conservative agenda is that it turns out to not be conservative enough, failing to carry through on a commitment to true standards. In other words, she allows herself to reaffirm what she has always stood for, an historic approach free from faddishness (a catch-all term, apparently, for anything that doesn’t submit to the progressive vision of a neutral history)—in other words, good old-fashioned education. Her mistake, according to her, was to get swept up in what turned out to be a fad itself. The confession allows her to re-articulate her fundamental stance towards education. Such a person turns out to be more flexible than the hypothetical accuser, unable to change course, but also more properly steadfast as well.

texture of things,” laying over a “rat’s nest of historical anxieties, concrete organizations and administrations of the world. [...] Rather, the capture is of the messy passages *between* base and superstructure.”<sup>96</sup> It is not the criticism that should grab our attention, but the zombie-like clumsiness with which we have to shove underground the thing with which we are struggling so as to not see it too clearly, so that like the dead they can surprise us by poking through the ground. “At their best, funniest, and meanest, they are the thought of *how real abstractions work on real bodies*.”<sup>97</sup>

More difficult, however, would be the task of simultaneously thinking the opposite (indistinguishable?) gesture, the ways in which real bodies take on real abstractions. More difficult, more horrifying, is the way in which the survivor *performs* mindfulness, humanity, compassion, regret, choice, and so on. (Flat acting, as one of the hallmarks of the genre, affords us the pleasure of witnessing this staging of humanity.) This desperate enactment of living, seen in the ways in which normality and tradition are frequently mimicked and preserved, becomes a way to avoid recognizing, as Malibou put it, that they “have already been dead.” We would prefer not to experience it. Paradoxically, it is the zombie that embraces life, continuing to live, while the survivor resorts to the mindless denial of death, the empty rituals of living.<sup>98</sup>

What if, in education, we are forced to survive? Forced to fight for life by bashing zombies? What if the very thing that the discourse of second births—of our proper educational

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<sup>96</sup> Williams, *Combined and uneven apocalypse*, 78-9.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 80.

<sup>98</sup> Let us turn to a classic example: the original *Dawn of the Dead*. Holing up within a Mall, the survivors, reduced eventually to a kind of nuclear family, create a simulated and comfortable home within the backend structure, furnished from the mall itself. The boredom of this hyper-normality emerges as the true threat. The flight is thus both *toward* zombies, and simultaneously expressed as violence towards them as the externalized reminder of the untenability of a normal home ritual—“Family values” we might say.

birth into a world, which is to say, non-biological and bloodless—prohibits is dying? As Žižek points out, the decidedly modern trauma blindsides us: even experiencing it, it appears to be meaningless, to come from nowhere. The most properly modern trauma is the inability to be traumatized at all, the banality of living, and the insistence on keeping on the run. If zombies never stop, neither can the survivor. The difference hinges, as in the movie *Zombieland*, on a simple differential in “cardio.” No Child Left Behind meets Race to the Top. Could it be that in education we are afraid to confront the shared experience of already being dead, avoiding it through our insistence on the performance of barely living?

Or is this the strange paradoxical relationship between learning and death? Cicero famously said that to philosophize is to prepare for death. Preparing, or learning, to die is a way of living. But the more one rehearses it the less it is an actual death. We may either discover, as is the lament over video games, that we live thinking death itself can be reset; or we find that when it comes time to actually die, we die as if it were one more rehearsal.

Montaigne cuts to the chase regarding Cicero:

This is because study and contemplation draw our soul out of us to some extent and keep it busy outside the body; which is a sort of apprenticeship and semblance of death. Or else it is because all the wisdom and reasoning in the world boils down finally to this point: to teach us not to be afraid to die. In truth, either reason is a mockery, or it must aim solely at our contentment and the sum of its labors must tend to make us live well and at our ease, as Holy Scripture says.<sup>100</sup>

This is the very difficulty of preparation; we get spun around—“the dissensions of the philosophic sects in this matter are merely verbal”—turning preparation into the strange resistance of acceptance. One deals with death by dying prematurely. “Those who go on

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<sup>100</sup> Michel de Montaigne, “That to philosophize is to learn to die,” in *Complete essays* (Stanford, Calif.,: Stanford University Press, 1958), 56.

teaching us that the quest is rugged and laborious, though the enjoyment of it is agreeably, what are they doing but telling us that it is always disagreeable? For what human means ever attained the enjoyment of virtue?"<sup>101</sup> If learning stands in relation to death, we must, it seems, even learn the nature of this.

### **Banking Education, Santa Claus, The Job Interview, and the Emperor's New Clothes**

If the notion of what counts as trauma proves elusive, what this can easily disguise is the way in which this logic of traumatic downgoing suppresses the other. If we are all traumatized, one way or another, we are not all traumatized together, or equally. This brings us to the second note. (We should recall that we are elaborating two complexities that emerge as the educator, Socrates, chooses to die in the name of a vision of the city.) Ironically, this suppression is done by refusing the other the act of sacrifice, by making the sacrifice *for* them. The prisoners at Guantanamo, mounting a bio-political counter narrative of sacrifice by refusing to eat, are force-fed. The guards are here, in the name of life, to protect the prisoners from themselves, from their own violent subjectivity. Likewise, in education, there are no "banking educators," only educators forced to bank by students who refuse to learn. "What else am I to do?" The guardians of the city dream of the revolution they cannot allow.<sup>102</sup> But even this is too simple.

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 56-7.

<sup>102</sup> This is the genius of Terri Gilliam's *Brazil*: the revolutionary hero is the bureaucrat; which is to say there are no bureaucrats, only resistance fighters disguised as bureaucrats, fighting each other. Witness the beautiful symmetry of the scene in which our hero, deep in the bowels of the bureaucratic machine, struggles to recover his half of a desk, only to discover, next door, another office worker pulling on the other end. That this mirror image will likely be read as "the real bureaucrat" is unfortunate. One should imagine him more precisely as the "hero" of another parallel story.



On the one hand, it is easy to forget how often this lament is openly expressed by teachers, prefacing or following some measure or another—more or less guiltily, but also more or less defiantly.<sup>103</sup> But such a defense, blurring the crime, suggests the other hand: the way in which, taken even further, this gesture can find itself indistinguishable from a kind of thoughtful or scientifically rigorous pedagogy. From “What else could I do?” to “See what I have done!” to “What would be more reasonable than...?”

A gap is introduced that both displaces the source of the discrepancy and at the same time offers to solve it. Žižek’s analysis of Santa Claus should come to mind here. Every adult knows that Santa Claus doesn’t exist, and they pretend, of course, for the benefit of their children. We extend their innocence. But what if, as Žižek suggests, this masks the more true inversion? It is not children who believe in Santa Claus—they pretend only for the benefit of the gift bestowing adult—but the adult, who cannot openly believe and thus need the children to believe for them. Education is the difficult site in which children are required to grow up while learning to be, or approximate well enough for adults, children.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> It is so difficult for us to recognize the pervasiveness of this response, barely disguised by the latent hope—“if only...”—or discount it as merely personal. But the personal, we could say, is itself structural: we tell this story as being *about* the defense of the personal in the face of the impersonal or inhuman. Let the movie *Lean on Me* suffice as but one example.

<sup>104</sup> The difficulty of course, is that children are often not so good at behaving like children: “Even so, they are still not naïve enough,’ the teacher complained sourly, ‘they refuse to take on that new-potato look. We set their mothers on them, but even that’s not enough. We’re just not able to bring out that youthful freshness and naiveté. You won’t believe, my dear colleague, how stubborn they are and reluctant to comply in this respect.’ [...] ‘That’s because you’re amiss in your pedagogical skills,’ Pimko sternly chastised him. [...] I’ll show them in the most naïve manner possible that I think they are naïve and innocent. This will infuriate them of course, they’ll want to show me that they are not naïve, and you’ll see how this will plunge them into genuine naiveté and innocence, so sweet to us pedagogues!” This is the essential insight of Witold Gombrowicz’s novel of education: the apparatus of schooling feeds on infantilized adults (the children already being too adult). Pimpko has already infantilized the narrator, dragging him back to school by his *puppa* [rump]. The headmaster betrays the inverted logic: “Would you believe that when we artificially belittle and infantilize adults we get better results than we do with children in their natural state? Oh, the pupa, the pupa, there would be no school without

Is that not what is at stake in one of the enduring pedagogic gestures, the evocation of “The Job Interview”? It has many guises, but its most explicit repetition hides proudly in plain sight: it is not uncommon for a teacher to share with other teachers their utterance to a student along the lines of: “Are you going to talk that way on your job interview?”<sup>105</sup> Like Christmas, the job interview becomes the litmus test for who is naughty or nice, but it is the mechanism that should interest us here. On the one hand the teacher is displacing the judgment elsewhere. School, we know, is not “the real world” so how could we insist on real consequences? But one day you will be interviewed and judged. Is the teacher preparing the student for the realities of the world? Perhaps. Does this mean that the teacher does not care how you talk (or wear your pants) and is merely preparing the student for the interviewer? Not at all. Rather the teacher displaces his or her own believe through the hypothetical interviewer/believer. (In so doing they take on a sophisticated and even generous stance: *I know the difference, and maybe even don’t mind how you talk.*)

The education becomes the heading off of a future judgment that is actually imbedded in the moment. Likewise the division between judgment and punishment is both reinforced and blurred. The student, we could say, is actually being punished for how he or she speaks, by being judged virtually, in a way that doesn’t allow for a defense (since the teacher is coming to his or her aid.) How does one respond to a hypothetical job interviewer? Don’t we know they

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pupils, and no life without school!” Witold Gombrowicz, *Ferdydurke* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), 21, 36.

<sup>105</sup> Again, we should note the odd script of it, the structural masquerading as personal. The way in which it itself fills a structural gap, shared so easily with other teachers, as if this were a teaching moment, a little gem, too good not to pass on, and a sense that it will be readily understood. It is almost as if you could prod for it, kick it loose. Indeed, that itself suggest a structural complicity: how many times have I, having brought a class to that brink of language, provoked a “Not in *my* classroom they don’t!”? How many times does a hairdresser hear their client joke about “feeling lighter already”?

are judgmental bastards? This is the brutality of the gesture, it points out and turns against them what the student rightly knows from immediate experience: that there are real consequences for challenging the virtual. Because it is not even that the interviewer truly believes. It is enough for the teacher that the interviewer will displace the belief: *is that how you will behave in front of my boss, or our customers?*

But even the student is asked to be in on it, and if Žižek is to be believed, is actually the most savvy. The teacher has a hard time believing what they are asking of the student, and resent being made aware of it. On the one hand, there is a tendency to insist that they be innocent—to desire to learn in all of the innocent ways in which one should desire such things.<sup>106</sup> On the other hand, they are expected to know the difference. It is not enough to be enthusiastic; one should know that one is supposed to be enthusiastic. One must also be able to recognize and acknowledge the staging of it, while playing along. It is not only perfectly acceptable but also encouraging if a student indicates that he or she knows that it is a ritualized game of sacrifice, within bounds, of course. Because now begins the battle of wits, or rather jadedness—a race to the bottom.

As Adorno and Horkheimer indicate, when the “primeval judgment” is lost (or, we might say, never in fact presentable as such) it creates a difficult tension: That the old sacrifice has meanwhile become irrational presents itself to the cleverness of the weaker party as the stupidity of ritual. The ritual remains accepted, its letter is strictly observed. But its now

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<sup>106</sup> Indeed, this is one of the strong forces of education, a desire for education to keep students from growing up to be jaded adults. For example, “One of the tragedies of the grownup is his loss of a sense of wonder, curiosity and playfulness, in short, of childhood. But these emotions are central to philosophical enquiry. Perhaps by starting philosophy earlier and seeing to it that it continues throughout school, grownups will rediscover suppressed reservoirs of playfulness and leisure.” Robert J. Mulvaney, “Philosophy for Children in its Historical Context,” in *Thinking children and education*, ed. Matthew Lipman (Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall/Hunt Pub. Co., 1993).

senseless judgment refutes itself, since its terms constantly leave scope for evasion.”<sup>107</sup> They are writing this with Odysseus in mind, and don’t take his cleverness, his deceptions well. He strikes a cowardly devil’s bargain to survive. “In the untruth of guile the deception inherent in sacrifice becomes an element of character; it becomes the mutilation of the cheat whose shifty look still cowers from the blows.” Adorno and Horkheimer would wish better of a student. A kind of fidelity and courage in the face of the collapse of meaning, perhaps. Nevertheless, this is to miss two things: 1) that this evasiveness on the part of Odysseus is not simply a lack, at odds with strength, but a critical skill, to keep turning when the truth is gone—which brings us to 2) the way in which these two narratives cycle through each other, requiring each other. If it is true that with this new Homeric line, the cycling of mythology is set down a line of perpetual progress, then the regressive line simply drives deeper. They knew this: “The curse of irresistible progress is irresistible regression.” But we should be careful in imagining that there was simply a time before when turning and deception were not part of the cycling, when things came full circle without discrepancy, without fraud.

It is a commonplace of developmental education to locate a moment when students begin to distinguish fantasy from reality, fiction from non-fiction. Which is to say, teachers may prefer to keep them separate as a matter of protocol and thus have difficulty seeing the non-fictional truth, which is that they are intimately connected.

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<sup>107</sup> Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of enlightenment: philosophical fragments*, 44.

## **Inverting the Inversions of Sacrifice: Two wrongs (spun quickly) make an upright...**

It remains to think the suppression of the other in this narrative of educational downgoing. It is not that the story does not bring the hellish bonds to the fore. But we see how effortlessly the story inverts the sense, turning it into the lament of the educator. How difficult it is, even in critique, not to follow *this* line. In the very act of attending to suppression, the story generates and performs its true meaning, much in the same way that modern education, predicated on escaping caves, must initially recreate and populate them as classrooms in order, only then, to re-enact the refusal to escape. That we have not yet begun to think the true suppression of the other is evident in the way in which everyone agrees to its essential reality. Both the progressive and the radical educator<sup>108</sup> start from the same premise of the urban cave. Education: either you are suppressing yourself, or the man has got you down. Or both. Take this apparently sober line from Adorno and Horkheimer, “The venerable belief in sacrifice is probably itself a behavior pattern drilled into the subjugated, by which they reenact against themselves the wrong done to them in order to be able to bear it.”<sup>109</sup> Perhaps things perpetuate like this. But so too does the notion that our plight is to find a way to save people from themselves. What eludes us is the ambiguity of sacrifice, the way in which it allows for certain modes of turning. No doubt it is a form of oppression and suppression. But what is it that we are colluding in?

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<sup>108</sup> Are there any others? In the same way that the “banking educator” does not exist any more than a self-proclaimed “terrorist,” we are quite possibly left with just two real variations on the way out of the cave, each highlighting the tension within the narrative itself. To leave this paradoxical tension at the heart of the city—between peace and violence, unity and justice—is, perhaps, to no longer be talking about education, to no longer repeat the narrative in a recognizable fashion.

<sup>109</sup> Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of enlightenment: philosophical fragments*, 41.

Sitting in a coffee shop, there is a guy wearing a shirt that reads, “It’s only funny til’ someone gets hurt. *Then it’s freakin’ hilarious!*” The shirt itself is not particularly funny. (Maybe because the shirt seems to fit fine and is not inadvertently choking him to death, which we can only speculate would be ironically and tragically “hilarious.”) Doesn’t this stab at humor suggest, however, a strange inversion of our sense of sacrifice? In sacrifice the pain/loss is the unfortunate toll required for the greater good. But what if it is the other way around, that we will willingly disrupt the greater good as a way of pushing to the limit the loss itself? This would be a practice, paradoxically, of being able to repeat or ritualize the crossing of the breaking point itself, and wearable as a t-shirt.

As if relishing the joy of pain, the classic essay “Sacrifice: It’s Nature and Function” by Henri Hubert and Marcel Mauss, veritably drips with academic bloodletting.<sup>110</sup> The forward itself, in classic Oxford style, doesn’t bother, in introducing this “important essay,” to refrain from calling certain aspects of it “rather lame.” Nice. Hubert and Mauss, in turn, nodding to their debt to earlier research on sacrifice, proceed to lay into the English anthropologists “who are concerned above all with collecting and classifying documents.” Ouch. But in fact—aside from demonstrating that burning others in sacrifice to the pleasure of one’s god is alive and well, perhaps unavoidable within academia—their critique stands on this slight: methodologically the classification of a sacrifice into a typology misses the simple dynamics common to sacrifice as a whole. The unity of the subject is thus a false one, based on the genealogical notion that variations of sacrifice derive from Totemic sacrifice in which the idea is to bind the devotees in a common life with the totem or god, and so on—that old story.

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<sup>110</sup> Henri Hubert and Marcel Mauss, *Sacrifice: its nature and function* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964).

But, they argue, such an explanation does nothing to explain the *mechanism* of sacrifice, instead merely reproducing in academic language older, popular conceptions. So what of this “mechanism” and what does this have to do with education? This is where Hubert and Mauss are themselves unsatisfyingly old school, presupposing that the religious explanation somehow clearly accounts for things. The purpose of sacrifice is, in other words, essentially religious: the sacrifice is meant to increase the sacred condition for the participants. But what if this were the other way around? What if it is the process of sacralization itself that is of benefit: sacrifice generating the religious as a strategy within a world that is not essentially either sacred or secular. Take for example the notion that cities initially emerged and organized around a sacred metaphysical structure, held together by the god-king. What if, instead, the emergence of increasingly complex urban forms called for an organizing principle that required a ritualized process of sacred participation collected into a god-king? The chicken or the egg?

What does it matter, if the result is the same? Perhaps they spin tightly on one another. But could it be, in this case, that beginning with religious ritual, oriented to a pre-existing sacred structure, might distract us into thinking that sacrifice has nothing to do with everyday strategies that are not invested with other-worldly significance, or that these are merely watered down expressions of religious functions? What if the internal group functions of sacrifice are the underlying reason in the first place? What if the common usage of “sacrifice” to mean any cost undertaken in the name of potential gain is not merely a colloquialization, a watering down to the banal of the primal sense, but part of the underlying mechanism—the

projection of a primal purity; the reduction to ashes. It may, on some occasions, go down a religious line of investment, even a literal one,<sup>111</sup> but other times down other lines.

If that were the case, we might find that the notion of “self-sacrifice” is not just a safer, more politically correct expression of a bloodier past, but part of a continuous and pervasive social network of such exchanges. Whether the object of sacrifice is a part of ourselves, or an internal aspect of the group that is singled out in the name of a higher good, through sacrifice we would be sorting out, not our relation to the gods, but what will constitute godly relationships with ourselves. In that sense, the externalization of the sacrificial object, say in a goat or fruit, is a way of representing our personal valuations. All sacrifice then, would be self-sacrifice. That was my goat, my fruit, my subsistence, my fertility. We would be in the odd condition, then, of sacrificing the very things we want for ourselves. In the name of sacred fertility I will give up a select portion of my crops.

What of education then? First, it is one of our privileged sites of sacrifice, eclipsing more and more, the religious service. The ritualized space of education is inhabited for immense periods of our days and lives. If it is as sacrificial as the everyday language of education would seem to suggest, it would also be important to see the nature of the exchange going on. The workings of self-sacrifice and the conflation of sacrificial-object /desired-ideal, might explain any number of perplexing educational strategies. For example, it could account for why, in arguing that education is good for you because it will empower you in your future

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<sup>111</sup> We would lose sight, for example, of the problem by endlessly recalibrating our sense of how common human sacrifice was—how we enjoy projecting the “literal” sacrifice onto others—while missing the very deliberate practices of it today, our reenactment in the implementation of the death penalty, but also all of the more or less evasive ways in which we demand a precise and literal (if always also dramatic) cost.



life, we so consistently demand that this power be given up in the daily rituals of education. To have power you must sacrifice power.

This is not always distributed so equally either. A certain amount of scape-goating occurs, in both overt and covert ways. This may not just be an unfortunate side effect, however. If we turn the sacred formula on its head, we might even imagine that this becomes one of the main functions of sacrifice as well as of the operations of education. Witness the shell game of “poor performers” at play in the shift from public to charter schools. Like the T-shirt, education will argue that a certain amount of bloodletting is necessary for things to attain their idealized form. But for that to happen, the everyday banal reality of educational space, paraphernalia, and interaction must be invested with an idealizing force, such as the belief in gods.

But this is the inversion of the inversion. Sacrifice appears to function by way of a primary inversion: to approach the heavens you must head the other way first, leave something valuable behind. But conversely, if we want to leave something behind, if we want things to be pushed to the point where someone gets hurt—if things are not yet painfully divided enough, tragically or comically—we might find it convenient to evoke the gods, to drag them up from the dead in a kind of inverted sacrifice. Can we ever sort out which is which, and at what cost? Could it be that this is always the ambiguity that cleaves to sacrifice? As Herbert and Mauss point out, sacrifice can be used to accrue or intensify value but it can also be used to dissipate a dangerous excess of potency. Of one’s own, or another’s? This is the difficulty. If the inversions of sacrifice generate an access of (re)orientation, it also sends things spinning. Do we prefer to sacrifice even our ability to say what side we are really on as long as things keep turning? We sacrifice in order to avoid sacrifice; we avoid sacrifice (e.g. the banalization of

educational life) as a way of sacrificing—substitutions of substitution. The inversions do not so much happen along an axis as they generate an axis. A spinning coin has no axis per se, only a tendency. It will spin around any point on its perimeter; The axis *emerges* out of these conditions by being willing to swap side for side, to send them chasing each other.

Thus, to repeat, the strange logic of inversion cleaves to the cave, suppressing alternative viewpoints. Far from being simply archaic, this inversion will intensify with the modern critique of industrialization and mass culture. The inverted image generated by the camera obscura will be emblematic of a cynical view of mass culture up through Marx and beyond. Like the dwarfish pseudo-city of Coney Island, the illusion that the inversion is self-selected by the inhabitants is carefully crafted. The true theater of urban mass education is not oriented to the shadows playing on the back wall; it is turned sideways, in cross-section, like an ant farm, so that we can witness the whole garish scene—not an urban play, but the play of the urban itself.

This will seem a harsh assessment, or woefully incomplete. It is true that with every repetition there are variations and unrecuperable initiatives. One is even tempted to locate an entirely different educational story, altogether loftier and less political, where education is simply a good in itself—an above ground education. Is this not the promise Socrates holds out to his young acolyte Glaucon? Yes there will be difficulties, and long nights of philosophy to win your freedom, but if we are persuaded “we shall always keep to the upper road...” The point would not be to draw this alternative narrative back down into the mud, but to show that it is the same birth narrative, told from a different position. Here it matters little whether we are talking about “higher Ed” or a “good school,” since the mark of a good school early on is precisely its preparatory effectiveness, its pre-repetition of the later image of emergence. All

the elements, however, remain: a narrative of height viewed from the side, ritualistic repetition, sacrifice, incubation, and a multi-stage emergence, complete with disorientation and disorientation, into the real world. Here, again ironically, “the real world,” especially in the case of education and philosophy, stands for a repetition of the incubatory world, just from another position in the narrative. Glaucon’s education might stay to the upward path, but this path itself is situated by the deep swing and digression through hellish terrain. It is not that we are choosing to follow a cynical, low path into the discourse of education, or following a digressive line through horror and war. Rather it is the very narrative of the “upper road” that finds itself drawn to the mire—as if it were trying to remember something, or derail itself.

This is the ambiguity that will not release us, that draws us back to beginnings that were never beginnings.

## Chapter II: Strange Births

### Labor Pains on the River Triton

*Whack!* Zeus' head is laid open to the light of day with the surgical strike of an ax. Out of the cleft in his awful forehead springs Athena—fully armored and fully grown. The sound of the ax is quickly followed by her terrifying war cry:<sup>112</sup>

Great Olympus began to reel horribly at the might of the bright-eyed goddess: the earth all about cried fearfully, and the sea churned and tossed with dark waves, while the tides burst forth over the shore; the Son of Hyperion allowed the swift-footed horses of the sun to stand still, until Pallas Athena had stripped the divine amour from her immortal shoulders. And Zeus, in his wise counsel, was glad.<sup>113</sup>

Thus are gods born. A shocking tale by all rights. And Athena's birth, here along the river Triton, was awesome even to the gods, causing the very sun to halt in its course.

But what has brought us here, to the river's edge, to witness such a scene? The question is, for us, double: what strange concurrence of events has brought about such a fearful scene as the birth of this goddess? But also, why have we begun our story of the birth of education here? We seem to have arrived too late to follow what has just transpired. Indeed, the story of Athena's birth is never so much told as retold: either as a straightforward tracing of fearsome lineage, or as what amounts to a character note introducing Athena. *Grey eyed. Born of Zeus'*

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<sup>112</sup> Pindar, *Olympian Odes*, 7, (35).

<sup>113</sup> Hymn 28 to Athena, *The Homeric Hymns*, ed. Thomas W. Allen. E. E. Sikes. London. Macmillan. 1904.

*head. Lover of strife. Goddess of wisdom.* “You know the story,” the ancient sources seem to be saying.

And if we can piece it together from these retellings, it may, indeed, strike us as strangely familiar. Zeus had, of course, swallowed his wife, Metis. Μῆτις; magical cunning, shape shifting and wild thought. She was associated with, and even sometimes called that trickster Prometheus, pro-metis, forethought. By the time of the philosophers, Metis had been domesticated into wise and deep thought, she of many counsels, but she was still not to be trifled with if only for what she would engender. Zeus had been warned by Father Sky and Mother Earth that she would bear powerful children. The second—“a son of overbearing spirit, king of gods and men,”—did not bode well for the current occupant of that position.

Unable to resist laying with her, but immediately fearing the consequences, Zeus grabbed her and swallowed her whole, so that she might council him safely from within. Or perhaps, in another variation, he tricked her into a game of shape shifting, waiting until she was a fly to then quickly swallow her. Or was it, as another teller would have it, that she changed shapes to avoid laying with him to begin with? In any case, all agree: she was consumed.

It was only when the din—Metis' having set to work on the inside, industriously forging Athena's armor became too much for his head that Zeus submitted to the ministrations of Prometheus' ax. Or was it Hephaestus, Hermes, or Palaemon serving as surgeon? And perhaps it was a hammer not an ax? We can see why Zeus would be concerned: nothing seems to stay put when dealing with Metis and her children. Best, at least, to do the birthing oneself.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> If some have argued that Metis serves a strictly formal role in the narrative, only called upon to birth Athena, but of no central importance herself in the codified significance of the

It is a strange tale, no doubt. But its awful violence and striking singularity is mitigated by the distance, by repetition, by a kind of matter-of-factness that has the ax blow ring a bit hollow—a safety precaution, perhaps, for us mortals, lest we approach the gods too closely. In the hands of the vase painters the scene will take on an almost serene quality, the assured postures of casual domesticity. By the time the story reaches a modern child, hearing it for the first time, it will be little more than a mythological curiosity, a done deal. Too bad, since children still understand the power of swallowing their worlds.

But perhaps this is part of the necessary effect as well. We eat to bring things within our control and understanding. Having digested things a bit, do we not recognize the stark outlines of this story: heading off an inopportune future, Zeus swallows dangerous and shifting thought itself, where it sets to work on the inside, engendering, in a heady cesarean operation, Wisdom—cosmopolitan thought in all her glory. It is a story of education, perhaps *the* story of education.

### **Forgetting the Strange, Approaching the Shore**

Now we can perhaps begin to glean what has brought us here to this strange birth by the river, and why we have arrived too late, as the Greeks might say, for the feast. If we were to suggest, with the gift of hindsight, that this is a proto-educational narrative—education in its messy birthing pains, an archaic mythic precursor to our more precise modern understanding—

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Parthenon of the gods, this would be to miss the precision of this exclusion or swallowing. It is precisely unruly Metis that must be swallowed to make way for wise Athena, mother for Father's daughter. As Karl Kerényi puts it, "Yet even here the viewpoint of mother-right retains some of its force. The feared heir to the throne is to be born *from a particular mother*." (Emphasis added.) Karl Kerényi, *Athene: virgin and mother in Greek religion* (Dallas: Spring Publications, 1988), 11.

would we not have to presuppose that we know where it goes, how Education grows up? That is, wouldn't we need to say with some confidence that when we say "Education" we know what we are talking about? If we debate, today, as fiercely as ever, over what it should look like, how it should go, and to what ends, we nevertheless seem to presuppose that we are discussing the same thing. But what then is this thing? What would we mean by "education?"

It is almost as if, in order to debate it, we must presuppose it, which is to say, to not look too closely. It is the familiar that is most a stranger to us. Thus if we go back, it is not because origins define and give us clarity, but because we are never free of their pull. No matter how much we prefer to think that Athena emerged fully grown and fiercely independent as a kind of destiny—fate having already accounted for all of the things that the Gods and humans do to game it—birth is never over. If each time we tell the story, the repetition serves to establish it as a *fait accompli*, it also indicates its perennial incompleteness. If it is *this particular story* that calls to be told again, it is because it is still busy being worked. The din forces us to bring it, once again, to the light of day.

We are thus called back to the river's edge. Or rather, finding ourselves there, we try to reconstruct an account of what has summoned us. In Stoppard's retelling of the story of Hamlet, the relationship between forgetting and summons is made explicit. Finding themselves on the road Guildenstern begins to probe their memory:

GUIL: What is the first thing you remember? [...]

ROS: No, it's no good, it's gone.

GUIL (*patient but edged*): You don't get my meaning, what is the first thing after all of the things you've forgotten? [...]

ROS: Oh—I've got it now—that man, a foreigner, he woke us up—

GUIL: A messenger. (*He relaxes, sits.*)

ROS: That's it—pale sky before dawn, a man standing on his saddle to bang on the shutters—shouts—What's all the row about?! Clear off!—But then he called our names. You remember that—this man woke us up.

GUIL: Yes.

ROS: We were sent for.

GUIL: Yes.

ROS: That's why we're here. (*He looks round, seems doubtful, then the explanation.*)

Traveling.<sup>115</sup>

The royal summons, we might say, produces a kind of amnesia, causing us to forget not just what has happened before, but even momentarily the summons itself. We only note our own birth, fully clothed, on the road. This relationship between forgetting, birth, and obligation, we might begin to suspect, is not peripheral to the story that has called us here. If the figure of Athena looms large over the people of Athens, it is because they are, through her, trying to construct a memory of how they were born, of what makes them Athenian—if only so that they may finally forget. If we, in turn, have managed mostly to forget these early beginnings, it is perhaps because we continue to imagine being born anew.

Pindar is thus not simply layering a dramatic and poetic context over this myth when he introduces the issue of forgetting. In his telling, the birth of Athena is an apparent aside, a travel note in another tale of descent, this time of the race of Heracles. Tlepolemus, the wise colonizer of cities in Rhodes, lead astray by a disturbance of the mind, finds that in a rage he has killed his brother for sleeping with Midea. To return from having found himself astray, he consults Apollo, who speaks of a journey to the shores of a distant city. He is to go to the very city that Zeus showered with the gift of gold, upon the birth of Athena, despite the city's own forgetfulness:

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<sup>115</sup> Stoppard, *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern are dead*, 16-8.



Then even the god that brings light to mortals, son of Hyperion, enjoined his dear children to observe the obligation that was soon to be due: that they should be the first to build for the goddess an altar visible to all men, and by founding a sacred burnt-offering warm the spirit of the father and of the daughter who thunders with her spear. She who casts excellence and joys into men is the daughter of Forethought, Reverence. Truly, a cloud of forgetfulness sometimes descends unexpectedly, and draws the straight path of action away from the mind. For they climbed the hill without bringing the seed of burning flame; and they established the sacred precinct on the acropolis with fireless sacrifices.<sup>116</sup>

Tlepolemus, to atone for the actions taken under the influence of a momentarily deranged mind, must make a journey of sacrifice, by going to the very shore in which the proper journey of sacrifice is itself led astray under a cloud of forgetting.

If we reenact these stories, the one thing we can be sure of is that repetition does not save us from forgetting and being led astray, but is integral to the repetition and sacrifice itself. We are brought to the forgetful land of Athena's birth because we too find ourselves forgetting. That Athena will bestow on the city unparalleled skill in the arts, despite the botched sacrifice, is a testament to Pindar's claim: "But around the minds of men countless errors loom; and this is impossible to discover: what is best to happen to a man, now and in the end."<sup>117</sup> It is almost as if it is *because* of this forgetfulness that precisely *techne* is given: the gift, from the goddess of wisdom, of a substitute for our imperfect memory. Perhaps we will discover, too—no matter how ambivalent the city is about this gift<sup>118</sup>—that one cannot understand one without the other. The gift of wisdom is to the forgetful city.

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<sup>116</sup> Pindar, *Olympian VII*, 35-50.

<sup>117</sup> Pindar, *Olympian VII*, 25.

<sup>118</sup> Loraux, *The children of Athena: Athenian ideas about citizenship and the division between the sexes*, 126. Jean Pierre Vernant and Pierre Vidal-Naquet, *Myth and tragedy in ancient Greece* (New York: Zone Books, 1988), 232-39.

In particular, we might forget all too easily two things, thinking that what we are reading is simply a dramatic retelling of what amounts to a colonization narrative. It is true, of course, calling on the gods is a handy way to justify “founding” a city that is already occupied. But what would be missed is the formal, structural necessity of murder and sacrifice in this recollection of founding event. Carol Dougherty writes, attempting to explain why Pindar would use this murderous founding story in the context of praising an Olympic victor:

Scholars have tried to account for this apparent anomaly by saying that Pindar highlights the good that can come after a mistake is made. While this interpretation is superficially accurate, it misses the deeper resonances of colonial representational strategies. As we have seen, the tendency to conflate a murderer-in-exile with a colonial founder reflects the Greek perception of important ideological similarities between purification through exile and colonization. Once purified, the murderer-turned-founder confers powerful advantage upon the city he founds.<sup>119</sup>

If Pindar tells the story of the miraculous birth of Athena, we might do well to remember that it is within the context not simply of the founding of a city, but to found a memory of journey and sacrifice that turns forgetting into advantage, murder into purification.

Find ourselves here on the shore of Athena’s birth, should this not prompt us, urgently, to ask what it is that we are forgetting? What have we forgotten that necessitates the journey in the first place, but also, what fires might we have forgotten to bring with us in order to properly perform our task of remembrance? One never knows in time. This is the challenge, and perhaps the challenge specific to education.

But let us assay a provisional answer to the first question. What have we forgotten that necessitates the rather uncomfortable task of feeling our way into these dark beginnings of

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<sup>119</sup> Carol Dougherty, *The poetics of colonization : from city to text in archaic Greece* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

education? “The work” of education has not ceased to revolve around this rather elemental scene, perhaps all the more so for not being obvious. We forget, we might say, the deeply elemental relationships—of labor and birth, bellies and skulls, gender and engendering, journey and city, sacrifice and gods—that allow us, still today, to *imagine* education. We forget how consistently this narrative goes *a certain way*. This is not to suggest a sort of simple “archetypal drama, “that we might use to make sense of education today. But it is to say that we may still have much to learn about the *force* of these relationships, and the complicated ways in which they *replicate themselves*.

### **Digressing Through Fertile Fields?**

As we wade ashore, asking the question of the birth of education, and discovering that there is nothing particularly straightforward about birth, are we forced to take a diversion through the fields? If so, is it—as much as the urban dweller might prefer to imagine otherwise—due to the banal fact that the city is surrounded by fields? Or is it simply a matter of a characteristic shared in common with crops? We know of course, as did the Greeks, that like plants we grow *up*. And it has oft been noted the agricultural euphemism/metaphor through which the Greeks will speak of reproduction.<sup>120</sup> It could be no accident, we might surmise, that such an imagery will cleave to the city, emerging as it does from the surplus that agriculture provides. There is no city without its crops. The citizens of the city, even if removed from the fields, must have

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<sup>120</sup> The difficulty of describing the specific form of this relationship—is it euphemism, metaphor, analogy, assimilation?—is increased when we understand that these forms are dependent on an elusive spatial sense themselves. On the difficulty, in relationship to Plato’s apparent assimilation of earth to mother, see: Nicole Loraux, *Born of the earth: myth and politics in Athens* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000), 95-101.

felt acutely the relationship between food emerging from the soil and the possibility for the city to be *eu kata kosmon*, well ordered. The danger, here, is to imagine that the imagery—the notions of birth, sacrifice, and ritual—can simply come to rest in the field, as if all the flurry is in service of a kind of primitive relationship to fertility, grounded in the essentially secular pragmatics of things. Myth as a fancy way of talking about grain. Or conversely, that the fields were simply the central, but crude imagery for what amounts to a deep mythico-religious *need*. The field as access to the profound.

It is true, of course, that agriculture and childbirth will be a privileged way in which the city understands itself. As Loraux glosses, “At this point, it is perfectly natural, they say, for historians and anthropologists of Greek religion to evoke the Thesmophoria, whose ritual program has no other aim than the reinforcing of the analogy between the fertile field and the female body.” Nevertheless, “Examined close up, things are most complicated concerning the Thesmophoria. If one ignores the preexisting categories within the ritual complex, it proves impossible to reduce everything to agricultural symbolism—as also to dismiss it completely.”<sup>121</sup> Which is to say, if everything seems to conspire to link field and female body, we can hardly fathom what this means without looking closer to those aspects of the ritual complex that exceed or even seem to move in opposite directions.

Loraux won't pursue the matter, preferring to rest on a cautionary note, albeit one that will resonate with our larger challenge of trying to read backwards into these narratives a question of *education*. She writes, “Here I interrupt what can only be an exemplary fragment of the history of the citation. I have, moreover, no project in mind other than proposing these reflections on *how* for consideration. How a tradition is built up, with everybody repeating

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<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 96.

everybody else and generally forgetting that repetition has occurred, and therefore not being concerned with finding out how the automatism has come about.”<sup>122</sup> Stumbling half forgetfully, as we are, towards making sense of our path toward the city, and what, if anything, it will tell us of education, we might simply pause here to take our bearing, and mark our way. Is this not the challenge that has sent us to these early shores? There is a kind of momentary lucidity, where we come to be aware of our crime, and see that if repeating is a kind of memory, a way of passing on a tradition—and we should not shy away from saying it, a form of education—we are nevertheless accountable for at least two modes of forgetting. We forget that the tradition we pretend to reenact is much more complicated and elusive than we would prefer to imagine; we forget even that we are repeating it. Loraux is thus correct, and we would do well to repeat it, in articulating our proper mission: “finding out how the automatism has come about.” This would be our path. Only, we should suspect that this is not merely a block to understanding the tradition of education, as much as it is its central paradox. Education is the story of this automatism, the *tradition of repeating as if for the first time*.

This bears repeating: if we find ourselves tracing the steps of a singular birth—be it the birth of Athena or, as we might contend, the birth of education itself—by following a journey (however forgetful and meandering) up to the city, we must be struck by two realizations. First, that as foreign and distant in time as these surroundings might be, there is something eerily similar about them. If education today prefers to forget these old tales, it is not because we choose not to repeat them, but rather precisely because we *do* repeat them. This ancient path to the city is one that we take still today, if in different form. Second, we should begin to recognize that this is not merely a critique of the failures of a modern history of education, but

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<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 101.

that this apparently originary path is itself marked by repetition. The challenge was the same for the Greeks: to walk a well-worn path as if for the first time. This will only become clearer as we proceed and the layers of repetition begin to accumulate, but already we can see the repetitions of the motif, the doublings of first births. If we prefer to forget—telling the story either as a timeless tale (as if education *always* was) or as a kind of *fait accompli*, reading back into it what we preferred to find—and thus distance ourselves from the specificity and complexity of these earlier repetitions, by the strange logic of repetition, this actually brings us closer to the ancients—who were most modern and, thus, like us, most forgetful. Loraux’s challenge is to both of us, closing her critique of the notion that women imitate the earth, with a call to reflect on what the benefit must be in forgetting—“incomparable,” to judge from the repeated effort.<sup>123</sup>

### **The City Goddess**

To jog our memory we would do well to look up and around us. What is it we might learn of the relationship between god and city, Athena and Athens? What pulls us from the side of the river to the sacrifices and rituals of the acropolis? Perhaps, in climbing the hill to the city, we might glean something of what we have forgotten. Which means, of course, risking going astray. What could be more foolhardy than approaching education through the birth of a long lost god, if not then approaching education through the city? Are they not opposed? “Urban Education,” today, lurks as a kind of beleaguered and marginalized subset of Education proper; a code phrase for the very limits of education. The city is the place where education is not at

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<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

home, cannot find purchase, has trouble even beginning, hostile territory, birth complications. The city is in need of educational miracles, small or large.

And yet education cannot seem to shake the city either. The comprehensive histories of education popular up until the early 1960's invariably start with "the birth of civilization." This phrase hints at the double gesture that is being evoked, on the one hand privileging the onset of urban life, and on the other hiding its urban roots within the more abstract notion of "civilization." Nevertheless, with a nod over the shoulder to the perplexing haze of pre-history—if only to indicate that something entirely different must have gone on then—the story of education starts its journey proper with the emergence of distinctly urban formations. It is perhaps more accurate to say that education, as we understand it, *is* urban education. Which is to say, to the extent that this rather obvious fact eludes us, we do not understand much. At the very least we would have to wonder if the elusiveness of the obvious is no accident, but rather part of the essential forgetting at the heart of the educational project.

Nevertheless, do not most of the markers by which we recognize "education" emerge as distinctly urban? A professional teaching class, the categorization of knowledge into distinct fields, the prioritization of knowledge over skill or craft, an emphasis on reading and writing, the creation of locations dedicated specifically to learning, the promise of upward mobility, the privileging of "storage" of information to be retrieved at a later date, and so on. From the early schools for the new upwardly mobile scribal class of Egypt—formed to pass on the skills needed to codify and affirm the narratives of divine governance, and to track the systems of taxation and support that both tied and freed the city from its agricultural base of support—to the compulsory public schooling of America, as a strategy for engaging the masses that flocked to its new urban centers, education is inseparable from the city.

There is a danger, however, in approaching things too directly, of thinking we can recognize readily enough the figures of education and the city, and simply articulate the relation between them. If we have forgotten the twin birth of cities and education, choosing to distance them, or emphasize instead their sibling rivalry, it is not because we have failed to repeat *ad nauseam*, their story—we know it all too well. Education: the story the city tells itself about how to approach the city properly. Thus, if one approaches the city by struggling to remember, we would nevertheless do well to consider what the city in turn hopes to forget by way of recalling and repeating the story of education. That is, we should not remember too easily, taking for granted the narrative.

Here, then, is the essential wager we find ourselves making on the shore of the city: that by entering into the repetitions of the narrative of education, telling the story once again, striving to recover something of its strangeness, we can begin to understand something of what we are doing—not only recognizing how many times we have passed this way before, but how our very desires for the birth of something new are themselves part of the driving force of repetition. This is the tension at the heart of Athena's birth: it must be a singular, awesome event, a birth like no other; and also take on the sure inevitability of repetition, sanctioning the predictable cycle of birth itself. Just another, if exemplary, birth. It must both stop the sun and establish the yearly, ritual cycles of the city.

### **The Twin Birth of a City**

To understand what is at stake in this paradox we have to understand something of how the city tells the story of its own birth, listening for what it says about education—and not just any



city, but the city that imagines itself as the city amongst cities, emerging, like its guardian goddess, from an immaculate conception, a singular birth. We must listen to the myth of the “classic city.”<sup>124</sup>

Athens: city of Athena, city of proper beginnings. The Athenians will never cease to tell themselves the story of their essential Greekness. Amongst all of the Greek cities, Athens is the city that is born Greek, from the very earth itself.

All races but one are as aliens engrafted or sown,  
Strange children and changelings, but we, O our mother, thine own.<sup>125</sup>

This story will continually be both recalled and forgotten. It is as if the story of a first birth, of autochthony, will both require the specificity of a mythic beginning, and the timeless abstraction of civic life itself, told for example in the funeral oration, where gods and heroes are replaced by “the City” itself.<sup>126</sup> To be first is paradoxically to always have been. As Nicole Loraux notes:

For a good ending, one needs a good beginning. (It is important to begin well, because of course the main thing is to continue well—this is storytelling.) Such is the implicit but all-powerful rule that a community anxious to edify by telling its story—to itself, to others, to posterity—should follow. More than any other communities, the city-states of ancient Greece respected this rule, because they were out to endow themselves with an exemplary history. There is no city, however, minuscule, that does not boast of once having sent an army to the Trojan War. But more than all the others, Athens interiorized this law and further specified it, or rather commented on it: “it is necessary to have begun

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<sup>124</sup> As Nicole Loraux notes, this idea of the “classic city,” implying a kind of timelessness, has a particular locus and time. The dream of the classic city begins not at the beginning, but at the height of the recollection. In this case, fifth century Athens. Loraux, *The children of Athena: Athenian ideas about citizenship and the division between the sexes*, 41. In this sense the city-as-city is properly born late, giving retroactive coherence to what came before, just as the “beginnings” of philosophy bear the name Pre-Socratic.

<sup>125</sup> Algernon Charles Swinburne, *Erechtheus: a tragedy* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1876), 335-413.

<sup>126</sup> Loraux, *The children of Athena: Athenian ideas about citizenship and the division between the sexes*, 49.

well” means that what is transmitted from generation to generation is something that one has always had.<sup>127</sup>

But if this is the intended effect, it is not without effort: the work of the city is to climb from one to the other and back again—from beginning well, to always having been well—until the path is smooth, the paradox sanctioned. Here is the challenge that must be worked over: for the Athenians, the citizens of other cities were all visitors from elsewhere, immigrants chaotically intermingling in their own city; nevertheless to be autochthonous, born in place, one must first take a journey, approach the city proper, if only in a vertical ascent out of the very ground.

From the beginning, in fact, the story doubles. Athens is founded by Kekrops, half man, half snake. Athens is founded by Erichthonios, immaculate child of the gods. Indeed the fact that Kekrops himself is a doubled figure might indicate that something is going on here. With the bottom of a serpent and the top of a man, the first king of Athens straddles the border between animalistic pre-history and the organized civic life of the city. Kekrops is a figure in transition, a figure of emergence. But of what, and to what? We should not be surprised to find that the transition is marked by both Zeus and sacrifice. Kekrops is the first to establish sacrifices in Zeus’ name, as the supreme deity, first amongst the many gods. This is the essential gesture of a founding figure: to establish an order of priority, and the assurance of genealogy. And where we find the Father, the Daughter closely follows. It is Kekrops that presides over the contest to establish who will be the guardian of Athens. The founder of proper sacrifices is, naturally, also the weigher of gifts. It is the olive tree, given by Athena,

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<sup>127</sup> Loraux, *Born of the earth: myth and politics in Athens*, 13.

that is to establish the divine character of Athens, not the brackish water of Poseidon. Athens is poised ambivalently on the shore, but is above all of the earth.

The mythic founding figure of Kekrops himself born from the earth, establishes Athena, born directly from Zeus' mountainous forehead, as the protectorate of the city. It is not merely a cultural curiosity, then, that Kekrops is also credited with teaching the city about the hidden sources of birth. Establishing sacrifice to the supreme god, the first teaching of Kekrops is that, despite appearances, children come from their father. It is within this context that we should understand this other first: the institution of marriage. Marriage is not so much what binds man and woman, but rather what in the binding establishes the father as the source of the genealogical line. We must discern the essential shift that Athens postulates at its very birth: with Kekrops we rise up from promiscuous couplings, like animals, under the sign of Hera, to the establishment of Father-right, where the woman is faithful not so much to the husband directly as to the lineage of the Father.<sup>128</sup> What could possibly make these first lessons of the city anything more than an idiosyncratic curiosity, closer in their mythic dimensions to animality than to anything properly educational? We might only begin to wonder if there is something about the relationship between founding births, sacrifice, gifts, and the relationship of daughters to fathers, that might teach us something about education.

Which brings us to the second story of Athen's beginnings, and the city's other first king, Erichthonios. Born of the virgin Athena, through the surrogate of the earth, Erichthonios is credited with teaching his people, amongst other things, how to yoke horses and plough the fields, as well as founding the Panathenaea, the yearly festival in honor of Athena, at the heart of Athenian ritual life. To illuminate our own journey, we should also recall that the Great

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<sup>128</sup> See: Kerényi, *Athene: virgin and mother in Greek religion*.

Panathenaea, every fourth year, would involve games, for Athenian citizens only,<sup>129</sup> in which a race from the Piraeus, the lower port city of Athens, up to the Acropolis would be completed bearing torches. Should we imagine this as a ritual act of remembrance, in which the initial forgetfulness of Tlepolemus is made right, or are we getting ahead of ourselves? In bringing fire to the peak of the city, is not the suspense always in the possibility that it will be extinguished before it arrives?

Indeed, Erichthonios' birth was not so certain, happening almost despite itself. Lame of his feet, it is as if there were birth complications. Should we imagine that the contortions required to be born of the earth take their toll? Or that this is the work of kings, turning sacrifice into teachings and gifts?<sup>130</sup> The lame-footed king, after all, is said to be the inventor of the chariot, and teacher of its art. For his skill, upon his death, Zeus will give Erichthonios the place of Charioteer amongst the constellations—a good ending, raised up from history to a timeless order. If, to match, we should thus expect a good birth—a properly mythic beginning—we might, at the very least, have to rethink what this involves. Zeus' generosity upon Erichthonios' death is far from the evasive gestures and inauspicious events leading to his conception.

But where to start? The birth meant to mark the beginning for Athens, born of the very earth, itself seems to have strange parents, themselves sharing extraordinary parentless

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<sup>129</sup> Evoking *Kekrops*, we should note that to be an Athenian citizen, both one's mother and father must also be Athenian.

<sup>130</sup> See Lycurgus', *Against Leocrates*. For example: "According to Apollodorus, Eleusis, being at war with Athens, called in Eumolpus, whereupon the Athenian king Erchtheus consulted with the god and learned that he must sacrifice one daughter in order to obtain a victory. He therefore offered up his youngest, the others committing suicide in sympathy, and so was enabled to kill Eumolpus in battle." (1, 98)

births. Athena, we should recall, is born with no mother in sight, in a transaction between male gods:

And when the time came for the birth to take place, Prometheus or, as others say, Hephaestus, smote the head of Zeus with an axe, and Athena, fully armed, leaped up from the top of his head at the river Triton.<sup>131</sup>

Almost as if to characterize the strange non-relationship between Hephaestus and Athena, Apollodorus will include him only as a secondary possibility. Hephaestus: the one, where Athena is concerned, who is always potentially hovering around. Indeed, just prior to this description, Apollodorus recounts Hephaestus' own strange birth. This time it is Zeus who is lurking: "Hera gave birth to Hephaestus without intercourse with the other sex, but according to Homer he was one of her children by Zeus." Athena and Hephaestus are linked, in uncertain or implicit proximity, by missing lineage.

How are we to understand this strange pairing in relationship to Erichthonios' birth? If as Loraux suggests, miraculous births inspire and attract other miraculous births,<sup>132</sup> it is not at all clear in which direction the attraction goes, nor even that such linkages might bear the weight of a kind of destiny. One might say "improbable" as easily as "miraculous." If there is a kind of attraction involved, fated or not, it is one steeped in missed connections, rebuffs, and retribution.

Indeed, in a strange quirk, resulting from the multiple tellings and variations of these mythic narratives, we wind up with a paradox that is perhaps quite telling: In the *Theogony*, Hephaestus is born fatherless, out of spite, by Hera, in retaliation for Zeus' solo birth of Athena, at whose birth, according to Apollodorus, *Hephaestus will have assisted*. The winner is

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<sup>131</sup> Apollodorus, *Library*, 1.3.

<sup>132</sup> Loraux, *The children of Athena: Athenian ideas about citizenship and the division between the sexes*, 128.

clear: the result of the defiance of the mother is itself made to serve, across time itself, the will of the father.

Erichthonios will be the result of an even further insult to the crippled technician. Athena, seeking out Hephaestus in order to have some weapons made, will inadvertently become the object of his desire. Barely escaping his pursuit, she will wipe the semen that fell on her thigh during the struggle with a piece of wool. Tossed to the ground, this discarded seed will be born of the earth, *Ge*. Upon his birth/emergence, the vase paintings will show *Ge* handing the infant Erichthonios up to the virgin mother Athena. Surely this is a circuitous route, if the point is simply to establish the divine lineage, from Zeus, to Athena, and through Erichthonios to all Athenians. Loraux seems correct in suggesting that these complications of transmission, and the effort they involve, are, rather than being later evasions, critical to the story. Thus, “we must ask what kind of benefit accrues to a city of men, whose dream is to reproduce themselves, by entrusting the civic earth with the task of avoiding all sexual union, *in extremis*.”<sup>133</sup> Above all, for our interests, we should wonder whether what is being rehearsed here is a particular vision of birth, labor and sacrifice, that will serve to bracket out all ties that are not in the service of the city itself. It is as if the first role of education is to recall and reenact this labor required to break any other ties. To learn to be an Athenian is to learn that one was born with no other history, in need of no other history. Athens, city of Athena, loyal to Zeus.

So why then, if the aim is to sanction a singular cohesion under the figure of Athena, do we find this doubling of origins, in Kekrops and Erichthonios? Should we imagine this as the inevitable confusion and profusion of mythic narratives, or an essential division of beginnings

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<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, 124.

down two distinct lines, one historico-civic and the other mythico-political?<sup>134</sup> One is the story of the birth of a civilized people out of a bestial prehistory establishing the proper criterion of marriage and lineage; the other the divine origin of a timeless political ideal in which marriage and parenting are elided, replaced by the earth itself. We can see, even between these two myths, the division of labor that will, in the end, also sanction the withdrawal of myth itself, in the name of the timeless political order of the city. To be born of the earth is to not have to worry about origins. Thus even this split within myth speaks to the organizing force of the mythic journey: it is in the climb from one to another, and back again, that through repetition creates the illusion that one has always been in the same place.

### **Navigating the Poles of the City**

It is only when we understand that both the distinction between these two mythic tales and in turn the distinction between mythic and political discourses express themselves as essential poles in the same narrative structure that we can begin to see the cohesive logic expressed in approaching the city—which is to say, these distinct ways of talking about the city not only have their specific place within the city, but they elaborate between them, the precise ways in which one is to move between them.

Following Loraux, we can locate, on the one hand, a generalized geographic valuation, in which “from the boundaries of the territory up to the ‘city’ (*atsy*), there is a series of concentric circles of ever-increasing symbolic value.”<sup>135</sup> And on the other hand, we can detail a

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<sup>134</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., 43.

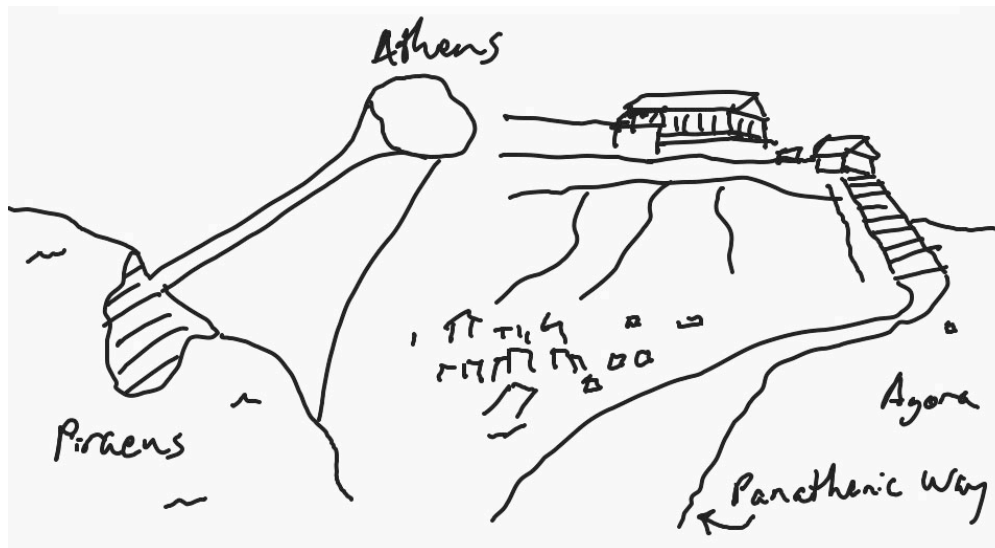


Figure 3: Athens and the Piraeus

quite specific tension and passage from the lowest point of Athens, the Kerameikos—the cemetery straddling the wall of the city, by the banks of the Eridanos River, and leading down to the Piraeus—up to the highest point in the Acropolis. To each their own discourse:

For the myth of autochthony finds its moment in the history of the democratic city above all during the slow-moving, repetitive cycle that, year after year, brings back the same festivals, the same celebrations, each marking out the space of the city: the Panathenaea on the Acropolis, the public funeral rites at the *demision sema* (the official cemetery of the Kerameikos.)<sup>136</sup>

As she notes, it is on the Acropolis that Erechthonios is born of the Earth, and thus it is also the place in which the mythic origins of Athens are told and displayed. Likewise, it is in the Kerameikos, on the other threshold of life, that the discourse of the timeless city will accompany placing its citizens into the earth, having sacrificed and died in defense of the central bond of the polis itself. Each discourse has its place.

Despite the tension of their pairing, a fundamental exclusion appears to be at work, recalling the strange parents of Athena and Hephaestus. Between birth and death, Acropolis

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<sup>136</sup> Ibid., 42.



and Kerameikos, “the son of the earth and the children of the fatherland,”<sup>137</sup> we must learn to forget, if only in a very specific manner. Thus, if to be Athenian one must be of Athenian parents, and if to be Athenian is to never have been from anywhere else, then the story of emergence from a founding Athenian is both strictly necessary, and fundamentally troubling. As Aristotle would note, lineage starts to stumble as one approaches beginnings. Better, then, to distance the child from the parents, until it is the unity of the polis itself—like Ge in the birth of Erichthonios—that is one’s true source. *The two distinct modes of discourse are thus held at a distance.*

Nevertheless, we should note the rather precise inversion that is made evident but untheorized in Loraux’s account of this narrative and geographic split: it is at the height of the city, *akro-polis*, that the myths of being born out of the depths of the earth have their place. At the very center and peak of the city, we find the stories, processions and friezes, that recount the mythic struggles of gods and heroes, that while constitutive of the city’s eventual identity, are anything but centered and assured, and are told to any and all who will attend. Meanwhile, it is in the low cemetery at the outskirts of the territory that one speaks of the highest functions that constitute the very heart of civic life. In the Kerameikos—taking its name from the clay of the potters located there, amidst the diverse patchwork of foreigners, craftsmen, and merchants—it is at the very least, into the mud of the earth that the bodies of Athenians will be given over, and yet accompanied by a discourse regarding the *polis* having more in common with the timeless celestial sphere, if even that weren’t too mythic. Here diversity will be excluded entirely: even the anonymous dead lose their own specificity, sacrificed for the essential unity of the *polis* itself. What are we to make of these strange displacements?

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<sup>137</sup> Ibid., 45.

If one were to divide and locate the discourses of the city between myth and secular politics, would one not have done better to leave myth at the outskirts, at the base of the hill, like Kekrops' serpentine bottom, and placed the discourse of men, of *andres*, at the top, in *the* Acropolis, the pinnacle of political life that will attempt to raise itself up above every other version? As much as we might aspire to such a neat division, this would be to forget at least two related lessons. First, that even when born directly of the earth, one must still undergo a journey. One is not simply born into the city, but rather the city is born by being approached from below. Second, if being born an Athenian involves ascending directly from the earth, we should not then presuppose that for an Athenian the progression of a proper life was in any simple way an ascent from birth to culminating death. Rather things may come full circle, just as Erechthonios' birth from *Ge* is mirrored in the death of Erechtheus', crushed in a hollow of the earth by the blows of the sea-gods' trident.<sup>138</sup>

We might then suggest that discourse, whether mythic or political, is never simply of a place, but formulates an *approach* to a place—even, or especially, when a chasm separates us from it. This is the Athenian paradox: in order to maintain that one has always been of a place, by creating an inseparable distance from all the other cities whose citizens only merely *arrived* there—even then, this discourse must arrive. One can hardly articulate the point. It is as if discourse itself disallows it, forcing us to say it one way or the other. Let us be more explicit, looking at how this process is born out by the movements of the city itself.

Indeed, these two modes of discourse are only understandable in relationship to the cyclic yearly journeys, enacted by the city, that establish them. Thus:

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<sup>138</sup> Ibid., 48. Euripides, *Ion*, 281.

The *pompe* of the Panathenaea winds from the Kerameikos to the Acropolis, and the funeral procession moves in the opposite direction, perhaps borrowing in part the route of the Panathenaea.<sup>139</sup>

This is not merely a contextual, historical curiosity. These discourses take place *as processions*. Which is to say, if they have a place, it is in the *taking of that place*. But more than that, the logic of a journey dictates that the “proper” place for a story is where it is least at home. This is the peculiar work of discourse, to evoke as essential what is not immediately present.

But even this way of framing things tends to displace the essential processional element. The procession is in service to the fixing of places, however inverted. Indeed, this is perhaps the strange function of a procession, to enact an uncertain journey, while allowing the transition itself to then recede, forgotten. Indeed, as we shall see later, the sacrifice is less the thing that is established and accomplished at one’s destination than it is what must happen on the way. One moves forward by way of sacrificing one’s free movement in the name of the necessary end. This is the forgetting that accompanies the sacrificial journey, establishing it as a collective memory. Something must always be left along the wayside, even if that is the memory of the journey itself. But it is still too early for us to make sense of the specificity of sacrifice.

We are still at the level of its effect. Everything works, in the discourse of the city, to assure that the uncertainty of a journey is smoothed into the surety of a procession. Thus it is not just that these modes of discourse of the city are on the move, spreading out ideological coordinates across the space of the city, but that they begin to map out a repeatable process. If life is a journey, it is one that for a city, must mark a common understanding of what that looks like. The singular narrative of heroes and gods also taps out the rhythm of a collective

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<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 44-5.

life. The procession of the Panathenaea, each year, also lays out the narrative structure and passages of the full arc of the life of a citizen.<sup>140</sup>

All the way to death? Is this not the challenge? As separate and distinct as the processions and discourses of Panathenaea and Funeral are, they serve to close the circle, so that one will lead, more or less surreptitiously, into the other. Loraux will suggest that it is in a third space, the Agora, that we might imagine their paths crossing—hypothetically of course, since they do not take place at the same time. Perhaps, but this would still be to solve, at the level of the simultaneity of place, what operates according to the dictates of a journey. For that we would have to—in the act of remembering both processions simultaneously, outside of the ritual rhythm of the city—choose to forget that for the coupling to engender the city, they must not come together, Athena and Hephaestus.

But does this invocation not thrust us back on the question of the middle ground, with the mysterious *Ge*? But where, if at all, would we locate *Ge* in terms of the city? And what would be its characteristics? There is no simple way to approach this question. It is almost as if it must glance off a thigh.

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<sup>140</sup> Ibid., 49.

## *A Detour to Middle Earth*

### **Some other boundless nature...**

We should thus permit ourselves to step away from the city, at least apparently, and follow a detour to another middle ground, or perhaps a boundary: the verge of philosophy, in particular to Indra Kagis McEwen's excellent analysis of what amounts to the first Western cosmology: that of Anaximander, poised on the cusp of mythic and speculative thought, and pieced together from the B1 fragment found in Simplicius' commentary on Aristotle's *Physics*. As we shall see, everything hinges on the interpretation of what and how things relate. Here is the fragment:

Anaximander...declares the Boundless [*to apeiron*] to be the beginning [*arche*] and element [*stoicheion*] of existing things [*ta onta*], having been the first to introduce this very term of *arche*. He says that "it is neither water nor any other of the so-called elements, but some different, boundless nature, from which all the heavens arise and *kosmoi* within them; and of which [*ex hon de*] is the generation for existing things, into these again does their destruction take place, according to the usage of time; for they make amends and give reparation to one another for their offense, according to the assessment of time [*kata ten tou chronou taxin*]," speaking of them in rather poetical terms. It is clear that having observed the change of the four elements into one another he did not think it fit to make any one of these the material substratum, but *something else besides these*.

Something else besides: here on the cusp of some new mode, still half poetic accounts of things moving from generation to destruction, we find something else besides what is [*ta onta*]. The physicists will interpret this categorically: *The Boundless*. But McEwen argues persuasively

that the portion of this fragment proper to Anaximander is more elusive: “this boundless source is *hetera*, “other”: it is unknown and unnamable”<sup>141</sup>—some other, boundless nature.

*Apeiron*: literally, that which has no boundary or end, or more “poetically,” what has no escape—a circle for instance. Or it may even indicate an inextricable garment: “You see, Zeus came secretly to Atlas's house ... to the deep-girdled [*apeiron*] goddess ... and in a cave begot a single son.”<sup>142</sup> The goddess here is Maia, a mountain goddess, avoiding the attention of the gods by hiding in a mountain cave, but also by wearing an “inextricable” girdle. Yet again, for the Greeks, generation would emerge despite, or perhaps because, the circle is closed tightly on itself. We should suggest another resonance of *apeiron* as well, *peiron* indicting the mainland, terra firma. Hence *a-peiron* might evoke its opposite—the sea, for instance, or the mountains in contrast to the plains. We will have reason to return to this topology later. For now, we might bring things to a close with another perhaps not unrelated sense of *apeiron*: “without experience,” or “ignorant.”

It is as if we must learn to stupidly forget if we are to arrive at the elemental beginning. Indeed, returning to Anaximander, even the elements recede. If we are to understand the change of time, we must look past the four elements to some other nature. We can only surmise that, like “*the Boundless*,” the “element” of the first line belongs to Simplicius as well. Otherwise we would have, as a substratum of the four elements, another element. *Stoicheion*: in the context of Physics, we would be hard pressed to translate it differently than “element.” But we should also recall that this fragment has already made a long journey through Aristotle’s *Physics*, and that if Anaximander was a physicist it was also as the inventor of the *gnomon*, or

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<sup>141</sup> McEwen, *Socrates' ancestor: an essay on architectural beginnings*, 16.

<sup>142</sup> Sophocles, *Tracking Satyrs*, 266.

sundial, according, that is, to an essentially Greek story, concerned as it is with firsts.

Anaximander: first to discover the *gnomon*, first to draw an outline of earth and sea.<sup>143</sup> First, even when for Anaximander, everything turns round. Anaximander: first thinker of the impossibility of being first.

We should not be surprised then, if the elements prove elusive. In fact *stoicheion* can also refer to the shadow cast by the *gnomon*, the length of which will be the measure of time. Hence, if this sentence of Simplicius' concludes by crediting Anaximander with first introducing *arche*—principle or beginning—he also may be thought to introduce the word *stoicheion* as well. In this light “element” might be less sure a translation of such a shadowy notion than, say, “aspect.”

If we attribute the first “*stoicheion*” to Simplicius, this makes more sense. According to this reading, Simplicius, in the later tradition of Physics, anachronistically interprets Anaximander to be saying that “The Boundless is the elemental source of existing things.” But if we are careful to separate out this interpretation from the later part it is not at all clear that Anaximander himself is suggesting that this *other boundless nature* is the element of things, even as a shadowy measure. Rather it is the four *stoicheion* that indicate by their length of time this altogether more elusive nature, rather like a *gnomon*. We shall touch on the question of time shortly, but for now it should be noted that this reading—teasing out and separating the imagery of the *gnomon* from Simplicius' encompassing grasp—not only strengthens McEwen's insistence on the mysterious otherness of an *apeiron* nature, but it also more closely aligns us to the elemental experience of time. It is through the changes in the *stoicheion* that we glean something else.

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<sup>143</sup> Diogenes Laertius 2.1-2. Quoted in McEwen, *Socrates' ancestor: an essay on architectural beginnings*, 18.

But what? Here we need to follow McEwen's analysis of the shifting interpretations closely. Now, however, the question hinges on an all together more elusive word, the relative pronoun *hon*. As McEwen indicates, tradition has it that *ex hon de* refers to *apeiron*, which in turn is seen as *to apeiron*. According to a traditional reading, Anaximander would be saying something like: it is not out of the elements, but out of The Boundless that existing things are generated. Next comes the interpretation of Charles H. Hahn, who argues instead that the *hon* refers not to *apeiron* but to the existing things themselves. According to this reading, it is precisely out of the elements that existing things are born, as long as one understands the elements in a less precise sense than Simplicius, determined as he is to link them to the four Aristotelian elements.

As Kahn reads the passage, *ta onta* refers to the elemental qualities of hot, moist, cold, and dry, and even more generally to the changing seasons, as well as (by extension) to all natural cycles of birth, death, and regeneration. To extend Kahn's argument further, for Anaximander, *ta onta* are the 'existing things' of experience, as experienced.<sup>144</sup>

As McEwen points out, what this reading suggests is a more immediate, mythic world, in which things emerge in dramatic relation to themselves, rather than out of already Aristotelian distinct categories. According to McEwen, however, it is far more plausible that *hon* refers not to *ta onta*, the things themselves, but to *kosmoi*. We should give McEwen the final translation:

The *arche* ("beginning," not Aristotelian "material principle") of all the elements (qualitative, not hypostatized, as Simplicius inevitably understands them) is not one of these elements themselves, but some different boundless nature (*hetera tis physis apeiros*), from which all the heavens (*ouranoi*) arise, and the *kosmoi* (orders) within these heavens. And—the inclusion of the particle *de* signals a connection with what goes before—out of these *kosmoi* is the generation *for*, not *of*, existing things, and into these existing things destruction takes place according to what needs must be, for they (existing things, *onta*) make amends

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<sup>144</sup> Ibid., 12.



and give reparation to one another for their wrongdoing (*adikia*) according to the order of time.<sup>145</sup>

### **Arising Into Birth and Destruction?**

It is a story, in the end, of beginnings. We should be careful to note, however, that even if Anaximander eludes his Aristotelian commentator's attempt to read *arche* as a material principle, this is nevertheless certainly a strange birth. Out of *kosmoi*, out of the order of things, is generation; and generation not *of* things, but *for* things. It is a cosmo-genesis in the most explicit terms, but only if we understand beginning to be something altogether elusive. Indeed, we should again be careful to attribute the first line, with its *arche*, to Simplicius, and emphasize instead that this should be read in the light of Anaximander's own language. As McEwen would have it, the heavens and *kosmoi* "arise," and out of these is the "generation" of things. These are both telling translations, but we should note that they are of the same word: *gignesthai*, to be born.

Except that everything hinges on what this means, and the use for the Greeks was wide. People were born, but also events might "come to pass," or things be "produced." But such translations are anachronistic distinctions. For the Greeks it was all the same word. We might do better to say "becomings" in general. It would be safer, however this gets us no closer to understanding the specificity of what Anaximander is proposing. We should be careful digging deeper, because even for the Greeks, the term was clearly already a generalized term, but a look at its roots is perhaps suggestive of what was being evoked. The root is *gen*, lending credence to the translation as "generation," and suggestive of one's race or genus—but also,

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<sup>145</sup> Ibid., 13-4.

more compactly, *ge*: earth. We should recall that it is the question of what to make of *Ge* that sent us down this path to Anaximander in the first place. But here, in the presence of a proto-philosopher and a model maker—and explicitly credited with stepping away from cosmologies based on mythic narratives—we should be concrete. Cautiously we might say, with *gignesthai*, one is generated from the *ge*, from the earth. Depending on context, we can understand this as being distinguished either from the heavens, (as the earth itself), or from the sea, (as land.) Within the context of the quote from Anaximander we might be tempted to land with the former, since he is speaking specifically of the heavens.

This does not, however, exactly place us on firm ground. If genesis in some root sense, *arises from the earth*, then this would lead us to an odd reading of Anaximander: it is up out of the mysterious *ge* that the heavens and *kosmoi* are born, and then out of this order things are in turn born. In addition to obfuscating the question of *gignesthai*, McEwen's translation leaves us, perhaps as a result, hanging. If existing things are born out of the *kosmoi*, for her it is *into these things themselves* that destruction *takes place* (*gignesthai*). This is an odd break from a simpler understanding—reorienting birth and destruction in relationship to the earth—not at all foreign to the Greeks. As Euripides put it succinctly: "what comes from earth must return to earth."<sup>146</sup> We should thus also note the oddity of Heidegger's translation, which at least comes full circle, "But that from which things arise also gives rise to their passing away..." We can see the convolutions that emerge from trying to think the *gignesthai* of destruction. Heidegger prefers to have things rise both ways, thus deferring to a causal sense for the second *gignesthai*: it "gives rise." But if this is a far cry from the simpler terms of Euripides, it does challenge us to

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<sup>146</sup> Euripides, *Supplices*, v. 532

think the question of rising. We should recall that McEwen also evokes this image when he speaks of the heavens “arising” out of some unbounded nature.

### Mapping Rising and Falling

Let us turn back to our path, climbing up towards the summit of the city, intentionally forgetting for a moment what we might glean from our detour into the undoubtedly fertile fields of the Thesmophoria. Indeed one possible answer to what eludes the pre-ordained reading of this festival, bringing us back to the forgotten complexity within the ritual, and picking up where Loraux leaves off, returns us to the question of “arising” in Anaximander. Arising is the detour, if you recall, from which we detoured in turn. But if genesis is not in any simply way merely a matter of crop (or humans) arising from the field, what are we missing? As if to remind us that the automatism Loraux calls out is not merely incidental to the question of *arising* we will find that we are not far off, in Anaximander, from models and mechanisms—and specifically a technology designed to locate both the earth, *gē*, and the heavens. We are speaking, not only of the *gnomon* again, which will remind us that we have yet to adequately think the question of time in the Anaximander fragment, but of two other technical feats: a map of the earth and a model of the celestial sphere. As McEwen notes, all of these taken together amount to a single attempt to establish a unified cosmology of heaven and earth, and of space and time.

Between *gnomon*, celestial sphere and map, Anaximander articulates—from different perspectives—a coherent imagery of *kosmoi*. What is more complicated for us is the question of

what to make of this imagery, and again, we should turn carefully to the spatial dimensions of it, to see what arises, only perhaps to watch it fall as well.

Little is known about Anaximander's celestial sphere, but let us just note that whether it was in fact spherical, or a two dimensional representation, it seems to have been an attempt to work out not just a spherical space, but one that would articulate, in the full sense of the word, movement over time. That is, whether it had moving parts or not, it had to reflect what was being expressed by the *gnomon* as well. The celestial domains moved and established a shadowy relationship with the surface of the earth. Speaking of the measuring of time in relationship to the surface of the earth, we can begin to see how the heavenly cycles engage with, what McEwen hesitantly calls Anaximander's "map." "The ancient sources use the word *pinax*, which can mean tablet, chart, or simply plank when they refer to the artifact itself," but just as importantly for our purposes they used "*ges periodos*, circuit of the earth, or way, path, or traveling around the earth, when they refer to geography."<sup>147</sup> The earth is thus traversed not just by shadows but is itself a kind of path, a spatial account of one's travels. As McEwen indicates, the "map" was cylindrical. "As if turned on a lathe" Herodotus notes. He also derides it for another feature, not without significance: around the edge ran the *Okeanos*, the sea, and surrounded in the middle were the continents. Here McEwen suggests a bold addition: that we should understand the map as a kind of shield, and more specifically, like Homeric shields, bossed, with a domed center, and like the hoplite shields of Anaximander's time, "convex, with

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<sup>147</sup> McEwen, *Socrates' ancestor: an essay on architectural beginnings*, 25.

a flat rim running around the outer edge.”<sup>148</sup> What emerges is not simply a flat map, but one that establishes a dimension of height, and in direct relationship to center and edge.

Hyppolytus says that the *schema* (form, shape) of Anaximander’s earth is “*guron* [curved, like a hook, or with hunched shoulders], *stroggulon* [rounded], resembling a column drum.” ... The earth, in the ancient view, was at the center, with Hellas at the center of the earth and Delphi, with its *omphalos*, its convex navel-stone, at the center of Hellas. The earth was the *omphalos*, the convex boss or knob, at the center of the cosmos.<sup>149</sup>

So what are we to make of this curious possibility of thinking the earth as a raised shield? At the very least, it is suggestive that the Greek sense of cities as being on the top of a hill, in a position of height, and at the end of an upward path, with the unbounded sea at the other end, was also echoed in their conception of the earth itself. The city—and in particular Delphi, but by extension perhaps *city* in general—corresponds with the high center of the earth.

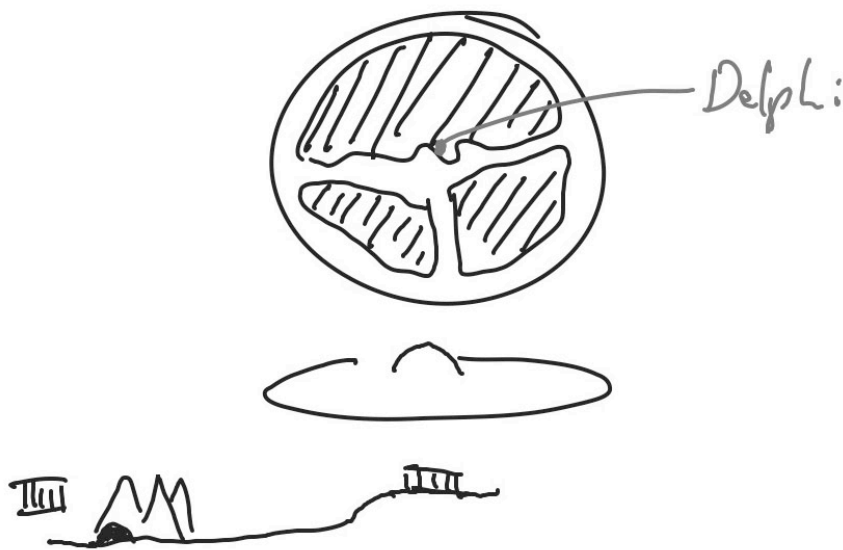


Figure 4: All the world's a shield...

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<sup>148</sup> Ibid., 28-9.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid., 28.

If we think of this map in conjunction with the celestial spheres expressed over time, in the other two models, we can begin to see at least two things. One is that the cyclical motion of the heavens was seen in relationship to an urban center. The other is that two distinct modes of height are now being held in tension with each other: the city rises up out of the earth as its height, but the objects of the heavens also arise (from the perspective of the city) up out at the periphery, as if from the sea, to the height that will be allotted to them. (And we should recall that Anaximander applied his *gnomon*, with its vertical rod, to calculating the equinoxes, the yearly highs and lows that accompany the sun's daily rise and fall.) There is thus a strict (inverse) correlation between the height at the center and the rising of the heavens at the periphery. The higher the sun the shorter the shadowy displacement of the *stoicheion*, the less ground it covers, the closer things spin to the orthogonal. (And we should not avoid recalling, here, the Athenian desire for the most immediate of ascents: born straight up out of the same ground, autochthonous.)

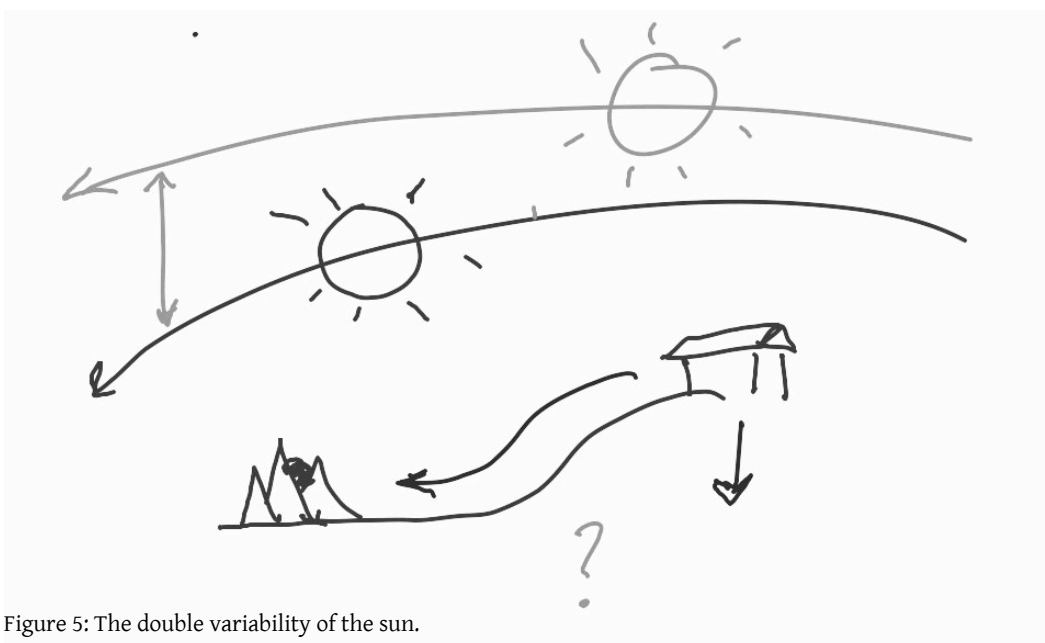


Figure 5: The double variability of the sun.

This correlation, this doubling and displacing of height, however asks us to think one more aspect, understandable only when we see the essential cyclical dimension, and that is that height conceived as a pure verticality, as in the central rod of the *gnomon*, exists in tension with a notion of height around something of a circular turning point. The heavens spin themselves up out of the sea, if only then to spin back down into the *apeiron* again. It is in this sense, against Heidegger, that we have to imagine the “coming to be” of the Anaximander fragment. Genesis *arises*, and from some *apeiron* nature, but it must be understood in relationship to the *kosmoi*—and that relationship is one of rising and falling, around a raised center.

As McEwen notes, *kosmoi* themselves are not only plural, but are also in variable relationship to *stoicheion*. In Homer, things will be either *eu kata kosmon*, or *ou kata kosmon*, well ordered or disordered,<sup>150</sup> but more accurately, in good accord with order, or not in accord with order. How are we to think this difference? This is precisely the challenge: how do we approach—in what accord—this difference that might appear to us to be the model of a *morality of approach* in general. Can we approach it head on? This has tended to be the strategy: to differentiate *eu* from *ou*. Things are good or lacking. Things might arise from the earth, or arise into destruction. To be sure, there is an *agon*, a struggle at the heart of Greek thinking, and no less so in Anaximander, but he also challenges us to think of the approach more elliptically, to see that what spins up, also spins down. This happens not through a reversal, as we might imagine, but through an elliptical continuity: the sun sets by continuing on its course—just as the seasons move one into the other with the annual drifting of the sun on its

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<sup>150</sup> Ibid., 14.

course; just as the *stoicheion* arcs over the surface of the earth, lengthening and shortening; just as humans are born of, and return to the earth.

We must simply be careful not to imagine that we can too easily establish, for example, the relationship between the turnings of the heaven and the trajectory of a life, as either being one of lockstep or of mere metaphor.

Continuity and variability: things turn around, coming full circle, but never in a simple fashion.

### **Coming Full Circle: The Myth of Theory**

Let us return to our starting point, but with a difference. Having re-worked the beginning of the fragment from Anaximander, let us pass once more through the latter part, mindful of how it might go *eu* or *ou*. If the first part allows us to think the emergence of heavens and *kosmoi* out of an *apeiron*, the second asks us to think genesis again—echoing the first—but now accounting for variability and return, for dissolution and death. Using what we have gleaned about height and rotation, we might suggest passing through a translation differently:

From (the emergence of) these *kosmoi*, existing things (in turn) emerge and fall back in accordance with what is needed, for these things give and receive with each other for their straying, following down the trajectory of time.<sup>151</sup>

While Anaximander will be credited with moving away from a mythological understanding of the cosmos, the language of this new cosmology is also deeply connected to the spatial narratives of mythology and the city, and in particular to the seasonal ritual repetition of

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<sup>151</sup> Cf. McEwen's translation: "Out of these *kosmoi* is the generation for, not of, existing things, and into these existing things destruction takes place according to what needs must be, for they (existing things, *onta*) give and receive and give reparation to one another for their wrongdoing (*adikia*) according to the order of time."



approaching and leaving the high center of the city. But perhaps above all, to the modeler, birth and death, becomings, were animated not in the abstract, but according to a spatiality that attempted to connect the shadowy changes perceived in the realm of a geology or topology with the experience of the variable line of the sun and the celestial orbits. Did Anaximander stand on the cusp of—or rather, *was he the father of*—a new mode of conceiving birth, of theorizing it? As McEwen astutely points out, according to the standard view Anaximander’s physical models of the workings of heaven and earth, like the *gnomon*, were spectacles, *theoria*, placing the human as observers, non-participating viewer—of an order.

“Furthermore, *theroi* were ambassadors to sacred festivals who left (were separated from) their native city to attend festivities elsewhere, and the assumption has been that these ambassadors observed, but did not participate. But a closer look at the ancient sources shows that many *theoroi* did in fact participate by offering sacrifices, and by taking part in the dances and the games.”<sup>152</sup>

*Theroi* were observers from other cities who may or may not have taken part in the sacrifices. We should follow our guide closely here, lest we get lost. The etymological root of *theoros*, McEwen notes, is with modern hindsight taken to be *théa*, seeing or spectacle. But for the ancient etymologists, conveniently ignored by their modern counterparts, the accent was with *theá*, or goddess. The theorists were charged, first and foremost, with the care of the gods. It appears as if McEwen is suggesting that the break between mythic participation and theoretical observation is something of a false memory, a revisionist history. Rather the relationship between myth and theory, participation and observation, ritual and history was something more like a continual “making of amends and giving of reparations to one another...according to the order of time.” The point is not to recover a proper reading of

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<sup>152</sup> McEwen, *Socrates' ancestor: an essay on architectural beginnings*, 21.

Anaximander, nor even to recommend a more immediate mythic sense of the world in the face of Aristotelian precision. Rather it is to show the ambiguity of this possible transition. In this sense Simplicius' appropriation and "mis-reading" of Anaximander is exemplary for its ease.

To postulate a middle ground, makes as little sense as saying that Spring is the same as Fall. Indeed, does not this reference to seasons help us fill out the picture? It is not just that the citizens of a city are born and die any which way, "giving reparations" as it were, but that it is in one turning into another that order is established. It is not that the arc of the sun, the cycle of the seasons, the ritual calendar of Athens, and the life journey of its citizens are all interchangeable. Rather it is that they each speak, in their specificity, to the essential order (*kosmoi*) of their cycling. Thus, we do not have two competing discourses of the city, so much as two irreconcilable moves that nevertheless depend on each other to complete the cycle. Setting out to approach the city, attempting to situate a reading of Plato's cave allegory within the topology, cosmology and mythology that it will borrow, carry on and disown, we discover not so much a solid foundation as an ambiguous ground harboring repetitions, reversals and uncertainties. We shall press on, follow what threads or "floating ribbons" we may.

When Loie Fuller's Chinese dancers enwound  
A shining web, a floating ribbon of cloth,  
It seemed that a dragon of air  
Had fallen among dancers, had whirled them round  
Or hurried them off on its own furious path;

So the platonic Year  
Whirls out new right and wrong,  
Whirls in the old instead;  
All men are dancers and their tread  
Goes to the barbarous clangour of a gong.

—W. B. Yeats, *Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen*

## Chapter III: Plato's Cave and the Shell Game

There are four legends concerning Prometheus. According to the first, he was chained to a rock in the Caucasus for betraying the secrets of the gods to men, and the gods sent eagles to feed on his liver, which was perpetually renewed.

According to the second, Prometheus, goaded by the pain of the tearing beaks, pressed himself deeper and deeper into the rock until he became one with it.

According to the third, his treachery was forgotten in the course of thousands of years, forgotten by the gods, forgotten by the eagles, forgotten by himself.

According to the fourth, everyone grew weary of the meaningless affair. The gods grew weary, the eagles grew weary, the wound closed wearily.

There remained the inexplicable mass of rock. The legend tries to explain the inexplicable. As it issued from a substratum of truth, it had in turn to end in the inexplicable.

The law of the quadrille is clear, all dancers know it, it is valid for all times. But one or another of the hazards of life, which ought never to occur, but recur again and again, brings you alone out of step. Perhaps this causes confusion in the ranks, but you know nothing of that, all you know is your own misfortune.

January 17. Walk to Oberklee. Limitation.

—Franz Kafka, a page from *The Blue Octavo Notebooks*<sup>153</sup>

Four legends, or is it one, or does even this recede into the mountainous mass? Rumors maybe, perpetually renewed: of sin and punishment, of secrets revealed and inexplicable remainders, of perpetual reenactment and weariness born of forgetfulness. Are we punished for our

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<sup>153</sup> Translation based upon: Franz Kafka, *The blue octavo notebooks*, trans. Ernst Kaiser and Eithne Wilkins (Cambridge, MA: Exact Change, 1991), 36. Franz Kafka, *Parables and paradoxes* (Philadelphia: Janus Press, 1963).

missteps, or do we misstep from the weariness of having long forgotten the crime we are punished for?

There remains the inexplicable mass of rock, a date, a walk. Limitation.

### **‘What is a cave?’: Strange Abodes and the Paranoiac Machine**

“It’s a strange image,” he said, “and strange prisoners you’re telling of.”  
 “They’re like us,” I said. “For in the first place....”<sup>154</sup>

It is as if we stumbled, left behind as the iterations, the law of the quadrille, goes on around us. Where are we, and what day is this? We have long known what the cave allegory is. We have long been told; making it perhaps the most famous moment in the history of Philosophy. It has served in precisely that role, a memorable example of the divided line that Plato laid out for us, putting it to work to explain the process of learning. It teaches the student what learning would entail. It will be a rare introduction to Philosophy that does not fall temptation to the allure of its pedagogical spell, putting it to work again, as if it generates its own seductive repetition. Irigaray writes:

He guides you surefootedly along a well-blazed trail, according to a tried and true method. No surprises, no cracks to be feared. He plays it all back in *reverse*, as it were, and with a certain irony, retracing his steps, confident of the destination, skirting all obstacles.<sup>155</sup>

But it is this facile transmission, this ready heuristic quality, this *deceptive* ease, that precisely stands in the way of understanding what is at stake in this process. “It’s a strange image, and

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<sup>154</sup> Plato, *The Republic*, trans. Allan David Bloom (New York,: Basic Books, 1968), 515a.

<sup>155</sup> Irigaray, *Speculum of the other woman*, 248.

strange prisoners you're telling of," exclaims Glaucon. But if Glaucon finds this tale exceedingly strange, Socrates will reassure him that it is not so alien, but that these prisoners are in fact us. Instead of being so quickly reassured, however, let us dwell on (or in) the strangeness, even add to it.

"For in the first place..." This is the strange enumeration: it will work backwards, following back along a line of resemblance (or caricature). A stripped down scene, *seemingly* out of nowhere, a first, this is nevertheless the philosophical reveal that should recollect for us the Oedipal riddle: the first to reveal the answer, he turns out to have stated the obvious, the answer was "us," or something *like* us, and all along. Is Glaucon feigning surprise; is Plato having Glaucon feign surprise? Or is it always the obvious—the narrative we are endlessly busy enacting—that eludes us? In the previous chapter did we not illuminate any number of resonances? The topology of the Greek imaginary was riddled with esoteric caves. The modern philologist might be excused for not recognizing the scene, so that it will take a seminal essay by John Sallis to point out what is staring us in the face, the continual hints and outright quotes, situating and further enumerating backwards the resemblances of this "strange" story, but an Athenian? Are we always like us, which is to say, unable to recognize our own likeness?

But what if what binds us together is the way in which we fall for the resemblance, assume the riddle was indeed solved? Telling jokes by the number is how we recognize whether we are inside or outside the circle or cave, not some "originary" joke. In that sense, revealing, one more time, its resonances, runs the risk not of illuminating our foibles but of masking the functioning of the reveal itself.<sup>156</sup> In other words, what if we forget to see just how

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<sup>156</sup> This is the ambiguous nature of this work as a whole. Following the repetitions in order to evoke the deeper sense of resonances—mythic, historic, urban—hoping to recover something from the facile

strange this operation is? It is not that it does not evoke all of these earlier repetitions that could be enumerated, laid up against each other, in a dizzying mix of resonances. It is that by establishing their similarity we would 1) fail to see how *odd* this structure is, forget to ask naively, what a cave is, and 2) fail to see the distinctive move by which Plato *repeats* the similarity, but with a difference. The spatiality of these mythic, topological and urban resonances has, to be sure, always worked by way of a kind of inversion, forgetting, and stripping bare. But as familiar as it should have been to an Athenian (and to us, who have never ceased telling stories of caves), what is most difficult to remark on, for fear of Socratic ridicule, is how *new* this gesture is.

Athens—notwithstanding its founding stories of being born from the earth itself in the time of the gods—is *young*. When is a large village no longer a village; when does it become a city? It is not simply a shift in scale but a change in organization. One doesn't discard the old functions, the old stories; one puts them to new uses “like” the ones before. At what point does what you are doing gain its resemblance and difference from what it never was? The Pre-Socratics, e.g.

Rather than stepping gingerly, trying to follow too closely, let us see if we can, like Socrates, set up a strange parallel. (A caricature to a caricature?) Instead of laying it up against its companion divided line,<sup>157</sup> let us introduce a strange, suspicious line. Deleuze and Guattari,

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repetitions by which this narrative of education operates, we must go even further, coming full circle, agreeing to our own ignorance, the *seminal* nature of this particular iteration, it's strangeness. If we are forced to confess that we are strangers to this thing we do, perhaps what is left is, as Kafka put it, “the inextricable mass of rock.” As if it were the walls of the cave itself that elude us. What is a cave when its senses exhaust themselves?

<sup>157</sup> The Platonic gesture, of course, is to indicate the proper relationship between these two companions, these parallel coils, by way of the narrative itself. The myth is a heuristic device for illuminating the abstract geometry which itself resides at a higher order. The allegory of the cave is

in *Anti-Oedipus*, write of a new historic mechanism that will disrupt the territorial barbarian assemblages of history: a *paranoiac machine* that will thrust through the current social order that Socrates' early interlocutors might still be seen to stand for.

It is this force of projection that defines paranoia, this strength to start again from zero, to objectify a complete transformation: the subject leaps outside the intersections of alliance-filiation, installs himself at the limit, at the horizon, in the desert, the subject of a deterritorialized knowledge that links him directly to God and connects him to the people.<sup>158</sup>

This starting again from zero, we might suggest, is not so much from scratch, as from a recalibration, a repurposing of the existing tension. It suffices to turn something around along an axis. Irigaray writes of Plato's cave:

The orientation functions by turning everything over, by reversing, and by pivoting around axes of symmetry. From high to low, from low to high, from back to front, from anterior to opposite, but in all cases from a point in view in front of or behind something in this cave, situated in the back.<sup>159</sup>

We can see a relationship being sketched out in the cave allegory that places the philosopher (let us not pretend we do not know who the rescuer is) as the intermediary between the Sun and the massed prisoners. When we realize that the larger narrative follows a similar structure,<sup>160</sup> beginning in a down-going, resulting in a conversation about the creation of a new state, which would culminate in the instating of a philosopher-king, we can recognize the paranoiac machine that Deleuze and Guattari are describing.

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itself an articulation of a lower order knowledge. But what keeps us from posing things the other way around, suggesting that the *truth* of the divided line is that it emerges out of a deep mythic line? A mythic example, an actual city, a skull, do not serve as allegoric or metaphoric tools for understanding the structures of knowledge. Rather abstractions and knowledge are what emerge out of the functioning of actual cities, of repetitions of stories, of the qualities of a skull.

<sup>158</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: capitalism and schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), 194.

<sup>159</sup> Irigaray, *Speculum of the other woman*, 244.

<sup>160</sup> Sallis, *Being and logos: reading the Platonic dialogues*, 312-455.



A leap into a new alliance, a break with the ancient filiation—this is expressed in a strange machine, or rather a machine of the strange whose locus is the desert, imposing the harshest and the most barren of ordeals, and attesting to the resistance of an old order as well as the validation of the new order.<sup>161</sup>

There is perhaps little difficulty in seeing the cave as a desert, as the most barren of conditions. What is perhaps more telling is the conversion of a “strange machine” into a “machine of the strange.” If Glaucon finds the image strange, what makes this a paranoid scenario is that it mobilizes strangeness and resemblance to create the tension between the new and old order that will call for the unique position of the philosopher. It is not enough to merely substitute orders—how else to explain the peculiar exercise of creating the ideal state only to demolish it before our eyes, or the following up of successful liberation in the cave with resistance to any further attempt? The new order must be posited as desirable, and attainable by someone, by the paranoid perhaps who knows the secret that might pivot everything—the first one through. But the uniqueness of this position must also be maintained by the recalcitrance of the old order, which maintains the sufficient rigidity to be played on—the *rigor mortis*, we might say.

To understand this, we should permit ourselves to lay down another coil next to the allegory of the cave, this one concerning Socrates’ “actual” death, as recounted in the *Phaedo*. Loraux, in her seminal and deadly essay, “Therefore, Socrates is Immortal,” gives an account of how Socrates’ both takes up and subverts the usual manner and order of death in the funerary ritual. He, in paranoid fashion, slips through in advance, knows the secret ahead of time, in a kind of living death.

Custom dictates that the body be bathed and prepared soon after death, after which the corpse is laid out (*prosthesis*); then the funeral procession (*ekphora*)

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<sup>161</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: capitalism and schizophrenia*, 192-3.

and burial take place. By dying already bathed and reclining, Socrates completes the whole first stage of the ritual while still alive.<sup>162</sup>

But it is not enough to simply stay ahead. This gap creates just enough room to pivot. Loraux notes three subversions: 1) by bathing himself he deprives women “of their traditional intervention with the corpse...their essential ritual role,” 2) he supplants friends for the due of the family, and 3) he proclaims “not the basic pointlessness of funerary rituals, but the sage’s indifference toward practices that are all equally worthless, since none of them has the slightest bearing on what is essential.”<sup>163</sup> Socrates is already off and running: “Bury me however you like,” he says to Crito, “provided you can catch me and prevent my escaping you.” But in fact, as if the subversions begin to get ahead of themselves as well, this courageous indifference leads us to two others Loraux will note. First is that Socrates is taking up and turning around the sense of *andreia*, “which is the word for both courage and virility and is also the password of the city’s ideology.”<sup>164</sup> It is also, we should note, when it culminates in death, the soldier’s pass to immortality. But if the route, or proper heir, to the timeless domain of immortality is being subverted, so too is the ritualized space and cycle.<sup>165</sup> In the latter case, the strata switch positions, turning the path around. The way towards life is through death. What we took to be the freedom of living is actually the prison of corpses. It is this that explains Socrates’ calm, and allows us to understand the paranoiac function distinct from the usual

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<sup>162</sup> Nicole Loraux, “Therefore, Socrates is Immortal,” in *Fragments for a history of the human body*, ed. Michel Feher, Ramona Naddaff, and Nadia Tazi (New York, N.Y.: Zone, 1989), 18.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>165</sup> This corresponds to the double gesture of Athenian origins, rituals, and mythic/historic time we encountered in an earlier chapter. On the one hand immortality is timeless and nameless, while on the other the ritual enactment is specifically located.

caricature of the paranoid as seized by jittery panic. Socrates' "courage" comes from the unshakeable sense that these subversions are already the case. Revelation may perturb the ignorant, but to the one who has already gone on ahead it is simply the belated culmination—about time. In the conspiracy genre the disconcerting effects are a result of actions being muted or delayed. To the initiate the only thing to fear is that they might be distracted and be on the wrong side of the door when it shuts, foreclosing the freedom of the revelation. The wane look of the paranoid is the pallor of a sage:

As for Aristophanes, who in the *Clouds* compared his pale, emaciated disciples to the Laconian prisoners from Pylos, Socrates refutes him by imprisoning the entire human race in a *phroura*. His calm in the face of death is manifest proof that he is the very embodiment of the philosophical nature to which books six and seven of the *Republic* attribute the essential qualities of the *andreia*. Philosophers in general are courageous because they do not give way (*karterein*) to their bodies or their desires, but Socrates in particular is brave in that, in the dialectical discussion, he is a war leader to his disciples.<sup>166</sup>

The philosopher stays the course, steadfast; only the course is not what it seems. Loraux is perhaps hasty, getting ahead of herself, when she suggests that this "once and for all detaches the idea of immortality from the civic glory with which it has hitherto been associated. This is where the long Western history of the soul begins." She in fact knows better, knows that long history is simply one mode, and that the civic, *the city*, is not so much left behind as spun around and repeated differently. What allows it to set off along this long line of flight is precisely its recoiling but with a difference:

The *logos* on immortality continues to be accompanied by a displaced and reversed discourse on courage and deliberate death. Perhaps this is one reason, the *Greek* reason, for the *Phaedo's* brilliant reputation. After all, the innovations that proved successful were perhaps the very ones that on the face of it looked like repetitions. Nevertheless, that is surely not the ultimate reason for the *Phaedo's* astonishing success. For tradition, as well as for us, this dialogue surely

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<sup>166</sup> Loraux, "Therefore, Socrates is Immortal," 29.

owes its great force to the fact that the model philosopher is here given both a name and a body and claims to have a soul.<sup>167</sup>

The world—after the paranoiac revelation—does not change, and yet everything changes. There is no going back. The effectiveness of the lesson, that Loraux runs up against without naming as such, is the way in which dialogue itself, as a mode of education, is now re-situated as the line by which the city will repeat itself, organized around this new figure. What the paranoiac knew all along was that the world pivoted and cycled around them all along, *the plight of their body a sign of the pedagogic work to be done.*

I commend myself to you, my institution doubtless continues to deserve support, our methods of turning out the pupa have no equal, and the teaching body is meticulously selected with that in mind. Would you like to see the body?" "But of course, my pleasure," Pimko replied, "as you well know—nothing influences the spirit as much as the body does." The principal half-opened the door to the staff room, both men peeked in, and I with them. I was appalled!... Never before had I seen a gathering of so many, so hopeless little old men... "Yes, Professor," the principle said proudly, "the body has been carefully chosen for their exceptionally disagreeable and annoying qualities, there is not one pleasant body here, all strictly pedagogical."<sup>168</sup>

What Loraux could have said is that "the great force" of this gesture for tradition was this modeling of scholarship, of tradition itself, in inverse relationship to a body. The warrior takes to the battlefield of discourse and is recognizable by what the figure precludes in the name of pedagogy. At first glance this might seem a harsh caricature, but paradoxically, to heed it may entail not abandoning this juxtaposition of coils too quickly, giving way (*karterein*) to the discomfort, not the least because it is a self-mocking caricature that Socrates himself will put

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<sup>167</sup> Ibid.

<sup>168</sup> Gombrowicz, *Ferdydurke*, 36.

to use,<sup>169</sup> but above all because it is still unclear what is at stake. It is not so much a question of what it might mean, but of the “force” of it. What is this tradition born of a repetition, this subversion that stays the course, asking of us?

### Strange Learning and Paranoiac Revelation

It is perhaps here, before we can turn or return to revelations of bodies, that we can begin to pose what ought to be the plaguing question concerning *The Republic*: if indeed it is intended as a heuristic tale, what has been learned? If the ideal state is erected and crumbles before us as unsustainable, indeed, if all the interlocutors have dropped by the wayside with the sole exception of the plant in the audience, Glaucon, then what keeps this from being a waste of time? To be sure, Socrates seems to have won his freedom, and will go home to write of his journey, but at best it would seem to be victory by attrition. Unless, that is, we can imagine that it is this very tension that is meant to be felt. If nobody has actually traversed the line linking the wall of the cave to the Sun, it has nevertheless been posited as *the* line which will serve from now on to define both the new and the old order, giving Philosophy its impossible task, its rightful throne. ‘*You are either with us or against us.*’

To be sure, it seems that there are various wayposts along the line, but this is precisely the distributive state of affairs, drawing out the tension, that feeds the paranoiac. ‘*The world is out to get me. The world is out to get me.*’ It must neither get too close, bringing harm, nor too far, and turn away in disinterest. One can see this stage structure in movies that operate by way of

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<sup>169</sup> As Loraux notes, his death bed is a fine time for Socrates to start bathing. But we should also recollect any number of inversions in which Socrates puts his “disagreeable and annoying” body to work.

conspiracy: a successive series of doors, bulwarks, triggerpoints, etc. The threat is pervasive and unseen, but also just on the other side of the previous door. If we thus learn nothing *possible*, if no one is allowed to get any closer or farther away, we could say that there is no intended audience. On the other hand, we could equally say that we are each the intended audience to the extent that we are to be situated—wherever we stand—but now oriented towards the new order. Again to be sure, we are no doubt *permitted* to get closer, if such a thing turns out to be possible, but only according to the extent to which we participate, only to the extent that we can become Glaucon, becoming Socrates. Glaucon will serve as a buffer throughout the dialogue, in the end remaining the sole sounding board for Socratic discourse—the eager student. “[W]e always rediscover the figure of the paranoid and his pervers, the conqueror and his elite troops, the despot and his bureaucrats, the holy man and his disciples, the anchorite and his monks, Christ and his Saint Paul.”<sup>170</sup> If there is little faith in the dialogic method here, the harshness seems to be coming from the barren ordeal of the narrative itself. Taken as an allegory of progress, the simple rhetorical point has been studiously overlooked: Socrates is confiding to his acolyte, in a stage whisper, that one cannot dialogue with the masses. If it is an illustration of the divided line, it is properly the story of the division in the line, and the lining up of things divided. The cave allegory *works* as an abysmal failure of learning and dialogue.

Is this not what is so strange about this scene: its eerie familiarity. It follows not just the structure of the dialogue as a whole, from its first words, “I went down to the Piraeus yesterday...”, but takes up once again an older tale repeated in countless mythic forms, of descent into the underworld, the land of the dead. Indeed a cursory glance at the tale of the

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<sup>170</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: capitalism and schizophrenia*, 197.

cave allegory will find interspersed any number of references to these myths. But rather than simply following the narrative structure, descending and emerging, Plato will delay discussing the possibility of such a journey. Instead, what perhaps makes this telling so strange is the way Plato cuts through the scene, opening the earth to reveal it in cross section. We might recall a much earlier quote of Homer by Socrates: “Terrified, Hades, the master of those below, leapt from his throne, crying out, fearful that Poseidon who rocks the ground would tear open the earth, illuminating for mortals and immortals the abode below—grim, fetid, abhorrent even to the gods.”<sup>171</sup> And again, back at the scene of the cave, speaking of the prisoner who finally takes in the cosmos, he again defers to Homer, “would he be affected and, as Homer says, ‘prefer to live above ground, and be the servant of another man, a poor man,’ and to undergo anything rather than opine with them and live in such a manner?”<sup>172</sup> Looking to the original context, we find that it is Achilles speaking, indignantly turning down the notion of ruling over the underworld.

But what if we translate Socrates’ quote from Homer thus: “would he be struck and...much prefer ‘to plow the soil for a tenant farmer who has been allotted little,’ and to endure any such thing rather than to believe those things and live in that manner?” This time around the emphasis is not on being above ground as much as being *of the ground*, and less on poverty in general than of having little land distributed to one. Perhaps in this reading we can glean a double bias at work here. To be of the soil, a farmer, is certainly demeaning in the eyes of our cosmopolitan interlocutors. But even this, the suggestion seems to be, is preferable to returning to Hades, the grim city. Indeed, it seems that an experience of the world outside the

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<sup>171</sup> *Republic*, 386d. *Iliad*, XX, 64-65. My translation.

<sup>172</sup> *Republic*, 516d. *Odyssey*, IX, 489. My translation.

city, seeing the stars, is what leads to realizing how grim the city actually is. To learn is to leave the prison of the cave and enter the field of the world.

Plato is laying out a kind of classic Greek topography, complete with an articulation of the backhanded gesture that leaves his interlocutors trapped in the middle, neither of the field or of the upper city. But he does it at a blow, showing it “fully grown, and fully clothed” as it were. Only its garb is not the gleaming armor of Pallas Athena. Instead the sun comes bursting in, illuminating and terrifying the inhabitants. This is the *strange* doubling of perspective, the surprising cut, the whole thing laid out in front of us like a kind of ant farm. In theater, when a player addresses the audience directly, they are said to be “breaking the fourth wall,” bursting the illusion that the audience is not part of the scene. But the cave is already a kind of theater. Have we “broken the fifth wall”? And does this draw us in, or disorient us further, positing some other place from which we might gain perspective? The implication seems to be that this would give us a kind of god like perspective, able to rend the earth itself, but for the Greeks the gods’ knowledge was not without a passional gesture.<sup>173</sup>

This is the strange reveal of the cave. The whole tale is told in a stage whisper by Socrates to his slumming partner Glaucon, told in front of the denizens of the Piraeus, the lower port city of Athens. And what they are to overhear is an image of themselves as mythic cave dwellers, already dead.

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<sup>173</sup> One might be reminded of one of the earliest uses for the flashcube on cameras, in the late 1800’s. The journalist Jacob Riis, in New York, would document the poor by pushing open a tenement door and quickly snapping a picture of the startled inhabitants. Thomas Heise, *Urban underworlds: a geography of twentieth-century American literature and culture* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2011).



### Inventory Time: (Recollecting)

Two types of wall, two sources of light, two types of shadows, two types of constraint, two modes of rupture, two types of turning, two types of stages, two paths, one shell... Socrates will run through the scene ahead of time, assembling and populating the stage, setting it in perpetual motion before introducing a disruption. But first, “Make an image...likening it to an incidence [πάθος] of the following kind.” *Make an image*. Where? Of what? Of what is at hand, no doubt. But this is the strange difficulty of re-collecting posed by the allegory. The inventory stage is a collection of things pinned in their places. Stowed. Socrates is describing the scene laid out in front of him, twisting it to seem strange.<sup>174</sup> But this is the hinge: each of the elements must seem plausible. A more or less random assemblage of facts—in the crime genre everything gets pinned to the wall before one begins to trace the threads, follow the evidence. And what comes to be evident is the rigor: in the end what seemed to be out of place and hanging turns out to be the key itself.

“‘They are like us,’ I said. ‘For in the first place, do you suppose such men would have seen anything of themselves and one another other than the shadows cast by the fire on the side of the cave facing them?’”(515a) This is the second pass already, running through the scene one more time, this *in the first place*. Now we must get in the mind of the killer. We know nothing of caves, only shadows, in the beginning. But what do shadows indicate the beginning of? Our storyteller seems to be weaving with what is at hand: the obvious answer to a Greek would be that out of shadows *art* is born. But does art take us “out of” shadows, or is it what shadows engender? Pliny evokes the shadow twice, giving it relief. In all of the uncertainty of a

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<sup>174</sup> A classic trope of cinema is the un/true story that turns out to have been assembled by what the narrator has been staring at all along. This is the pivot point of *The Usual Suspects*, for example, or the play within a play in *Hamlet*.

first place,<sup>175</sup> “some of [the Greeks] say [painting] was discovered at Sicyon, others at Corinth, but all agree that it began with tracing an outline around a man’s shadow.” In the next pass, the next retracing, the next addition, we move from painting to sculpture, created by a potter, Butades:

He did this owing to his daughter, who was in love with a young man; and she, when he was going abroad, drew in outline on the wall the shadow of his face thrown by the lamp. Her father pressed clay on this and made a relief, which he hardened by exposure to fire.<sup>176</sup>

It is as if a “man” leaves his shadow: Memory. There is no indication, of course, that in the repetitions of Plato’s cave the shadows were traced or fixed. As if the prisoners are not even allowed to remember the passing of the shadows, to mourn. As Victor I. Stoichiță speculates, this is the unspoken, (perhaps unspeakable), subtraction of Pliny’s account: the Father would have added the clay upon the death of the young man, his terminal absence. “The clay semblance,” then, “becomes a cult object in the temple at Corinth.”<sup>177</sup> But in Plato’s case, it is the prisoners themselves that are perhaps dead, cut off from their own shadows, unable even to establish a trace.

Stoichiță will turn to Plato’s scene next. However, in doing so he seems to have lost the thread he was able to unravel in the night with Pliny. It is true enough, if itself brutally frontal,

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<sup>175</sup> “GUIL: [...] What’s the first thing you remember?

ROS: Oh, let’s see.... The first thing that comes into my head, you mean?

GUIL: No—the first thing you remember.

ROS: Ah. (Pauses.) No, it’s no good, it’s gone. It was a long time ago.

GUIL: (patient but edged): You don’t get my meaning. What is the first thing after all the things you’ve forgotten?

Stoppard, *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern are dead*, 16.

<sup>176</sup> Pliny, *Natural History*, xxxv.

<sup>177</sup> Victor Ieronim Stoichiță, *A short history of the shadow* (London: Reaktion Books, 1999), 18-9.

to suggest as he does that, “The ‘installation’ of the cave is complicated, and the cruel staging of the cognitive plot is blatantly sadistic. Plato has the perverse vision of a philosopher who enjoys the spectacle of ignorance as much as he enjoys the quest for knowledge.”<sup>178</sup> In shining the light on this shadowy scene, however, he too quickly falls for the trap of reading it as the *first place* of a whole history of ‘oculocentric’ culture. But what do we miss in this revelation? What makes the ocular centric, if we can put it thus, might revolve around a whole scenario of the body and movement. He is correct to note that anything other than a visual desire is stripped of the scene or suppressed: touch, taste, smell. Even sound, which we will come to shortly, is “just an adjunct to reinforcing a primitive illusion of a visual order.”<sup>179</sup> But this is precisely to fall for it. What remains? This is the question. What, after all of the suppressions and exclusions, cannot help but be there? What, robbed of memory, of a trace, slips through anyway? Prometheus, chained to a rock in the Caucasus mountains, in perpetuity, forgetting even his sin, can nevertheless recall his own exhaustion, the wound itself finds itself closing wearily. Unable to leave, breaking the cycle, it remains for him still to press himself into the rock itself, which itself issues and recedes. We cannot insist upon this enough. We are so used to the gesture working, cycling through, that we don’t bother to check our math, even in critique.

In falling for the trap, dismissing the remainder, Stoichiță drops the more critical thread having to do with shadows that he so astutely draws out from Pliny in the night. It has, we should not be surprised, to do with time—with day and night. As a way in we should recall: the man’s reflection was first traced by the light of a lamp. A matter of contrast. We should

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<sup>178</sup> Ibid., 21-2.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid., 22.

surmise either that it was done at night, or in night's own strange double, the inside of a home, or a cave. What is the effect?

Once the image is captured on the wall, time stands still. The *shadow/time* relationship as illustrated by the nocturnal scenario in Pliny's version of the myth (which contrasts sharply with the diurnal, solar version related by Quintilian) is formulated in a very characteristic manner: a shadow in sunlight denotes a movement in time and no more than that, but a nocturnal shadow is removed from the natural order of time, it halts the flow of progress.<sup>180</sup>

We should recall the *gnomon* from earlier—the shadow maker whose moving trace tracks time itself, the daily arc of the sun and its seasonal displacement. The variation within repetition. The problem with caves, we could say, is that they *already* fix the shadows. If the scene is “sadistic” it is not essentially from violence, but in the sense of its *fixation*, stripped even of a sadist.<sup>181</sup> The shadows, free from any tracing or memory, do not so much move as appear to move—they *flicker*. But they go nowhere, have no time. Night is day. In other words, what ocularcentrism causes us to forget is the *movement* of time, replacing it with a double: an illusion of movement, and a moving image of the illusion.

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<sup>180</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>181</sup> We should reflect on this absence. Although the story coils around and repeats itself, it is precisely not personal, but nor does it have the feel of the pure mathematician, the sadist removing himself from the equation in order for the (dis)order of things to be etched into flesh. Should we not think, instead, of the masochist's frozen tableaux? Deleuze, decoupling the Sado-Masochist pair, writes, “In every respect [...] the sadistic ‘instructor’ stands in contrast to the masochistic ‘educator.’ [...] In the work of Masoch there is a similar transcendence of the imperative and the descriptive toward a higher function. But in this case it is all persuasion and education. We are no longer in the presence of a torturer seizing upon a victim and enjoying her all the more because she is unconsenting and unpersuaded. We are dealing instead with a victim in search of a torturer and who needs to educate, persuade and conclude an alliance with the torturer in order to realize *the strangest of schemes*. [...] It is essential to the masochist that he should fashion the woman into a despot, that he should persuade her to cooperate and get her to ‘sign.’ He is essentially an educator and thus runs the risk inherent in educational undertakings.” [emphasis added] The risk, or we should say, the unavoidable ambiguity, is evident in the Socratic dialogues as well: as much as the other may be persuaded, doubt pervades the scene: they are asked to sign on to a role for which they will prove inadequate, “either by overplaying or by falling short of expectations.” Gilles Deleuze and Leopold Sacher-Masoch, *Masochism* (New York: Zone Books, 1989), 19-21.

This is the disconcerting move of this second pass: we are in it, *they are like us*, we fall for the illusion, seeing movement in shadows, mistaking shadows for the real. But it is layered over the first pass as well, the tableau. We see the scene itself laid out in front of us, busy but going nowhere—an apparatus, an illusion factory. What is this but an aesthetic of illusion itself? It distracts us because it appears to explain, but it itself operates by way of a shorthand. Factories have their own functional aesthetic. That is, not an aesthetic that works, although it does that as well, but an aesthetic of function.<sup>182</sup> You know a factory when you see one. It signifies, exceeds itself, even if in being excessively streamlined. The function, in fashion, of the array of men's pockets is the inverse equivalent of their dearth in women's clothing—they both exceed the function in the interests of something else, *an image of storage or the want of storage*. We can say the same of schools: they double back, both instantiating a linear mode of travel, a mechanism of illusion, in which we cannot see past the next class, the next corridor, the next assignment, but they also display an excessively mapped façade, (or a cutaway that amounts to the same thing.)

This is the doubling of the shadow play. A displaced light source, fixed and out of sight, creates a sense of movement, but is actually a result of the exclusion, the darkening of another moving light source (whose shadow cast by the *gnomon* creeps ever so slowly.) The theater

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<sup>182</sup> This is one of the deep tensions of architectural modernism, for example. Let one reference suffice: Mauro F. Guillén, *The Taylorized beauty of the mechanical: scientific management and the rise of modernist architecture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006). We should simply be quick to note the way in which things do not stay put, but coil and resonated across scales. The Taylorism of a factory can be writ large as a city plan, or transformed into modern housing. Dwight H. Perkins, the school architect in Chicago, looking for a progressive architecture of the people, turned to the Prairie Schools abstract nature, but also to the factory, a new horizontality not at all conceived as at odds with nature, but an extension of productive nature itself. Factory, field, school, department store—we recognize the specificity, but it also eludes us. A school is not—in aesthetic or function—a factory, but it also is just that, and in both ways.

effect. But we can only appreciate the effect by... by what? By moving between them? We are getting ahead of ourselves, so used to the steps. By what memory, on the path out of the cave, do we recall the lack of recollection itself, our own stillness, our own death? Plato will suggest this is both possible (education is an effect of taking someone along this path and allowing the difference to register) and not likely (resistance threatens to foreclose it within the cave, or as in the myth of Er that will end the dialogue, it is only by a strange unaccountable anomaly that Er does not pass through the river of *Lethe*, of forgetting, that is the structural norm for returning from the land of the dead.) But this is already the third pass. The more careful question is what, setting a scene, and also embedding ourselves within it (“they are like us”) allows us to understand the nature of the play? Haven’t we simply doubled the scene, or the lack thereof? We are prisoners looking at a wall that we cannot discern as theatrical. We are shown the scene from the side so that the whole thing is laid out before us, but itself a fixed image. Our cave, it seems, comes with us.

Of course, this is the relentlessness of the scene, the helplessness of the prisoners that are us. We have nothing to go on, nothing to leverage, no apparent inventory, only a timeless flow of shadows. This is precisely the cave, this systemic night, this false day. It would take someone else to seize us and turn us. This is why the voice gets us nowhere, a mere supplement to the ocular. Stoichița is right. Sound, rather than allowing us to orient in space differently, simply reinforces the illusion, bouncing off the wall, so that we imagine it emanates from the shadows themselves. The blockage of the back wall actually serves to continue the line that constrains us. It simply reflects or bounces everything directly back—a turn that is simply a return.

There is something maddening about the soberness of this return, as if it were nothing. Perhaps it is because we want to imagine that voices emanating from a cave should themselves be maddening, doubling. It is as if even here the vital is being stripped away. Steven Conner, in his history of ventriloquism, naturally starts us off deep within the earth: “the Delphic oracle became the prime exhibit in a Western tradition which associated prophecy and profane arts of divination with ventriloquism, which is to say speaking with the voice of another, or the voice of another speaking through oneself.”<sup>183</sup> He is quick to concur, however, with the judgement of Joseph Fontenrose, that our fascination with the maddening tale is at odds with the sobering facts. No chasm, no vapors, no frenzied goddess. There remains simply our *desire* and repetition itself. Fontenrose writes:

They want to believe in toxic gases or vapors rising from a chasm (their non-existence was demonstrated over seventy years ago), a frenzied or drugged Pythia talking incoherently, cleverly ambiguous prophecies and remarkable predictions that prophets or attendant bards expressed in dactylic hexameter. [...] Probably two centuries from now readers will pick up a new book or article that will tell them about the toxic gases.<sup>184</sup>

Plato would no doubt have agreed. Nevertheless, Connor is quick to assert a less dismissive question, which is *why* the myth should have lingered so long, the “power of the oracle-myth itself, and of the cultural and imaginative work that it has been able to do in post-classical times.” Perhaps another way of putting it, turning it around, would be to ask, what are Plato and Fontenrose trying to be so sober in response to except the frenzy about ventriloquism

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<sup>183</sup> Steven Connor, *Dumbstruck: a cultural history of ventriloquism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

<sup>184</sup> Quoted in: *Ibid.*, 48. What Fontenrose was not in a position to also “prophecy” was that likewise in two centuries, there will be another Fontenrose, another Plato, another sober voice itself proclaiming the need to end the myth of speaking in the voice of another... What Fontenrose was not in a position to also “prophecy” was that likewise in two centuries, there will be another Fontenrose, another Plato, another sober voice itself proclaiming the need to end the myth of speaking in the voice of another...

itself? Shining light into the cave, Plato both confirms and blocks the narrative. If voices echo from caverns, and if, “the earth first is seen as a full, closed surface, a meadow that is not yet a field, has not yet entered into culture” then the opening matters: “Such openings, in the form of chasms and caves, were at once the confirmation and the transgression of the earth’s power to hold and store items of value.”<sup>185</sup> Plato’s transgression against the earth was to reveal that its mysterious voices were nothing much at all. It is not the mysteries that speak but our own stomachs. As Connor notes, in the *Sophist*, the Eleatic visitor protests against those who refuse metaphor, since they cannot help but use it themselves: “they have their enemy and adversary within and carry him about with them wherever they go; his mocking voice, like that of the amazing Eurycles, makes itself heard from their own vitals.”<sup>186</sup> From one interior, bouncing off the walls of another interior, the only mystery for Plato is why we get so worked up about it, since it gets us nowhere, orienting us to the mass of rock itself.

How is it though, that this banal ventriloquism is a constraint? This is the odd multiplication of bonds. Again, we see the odd “educational” reduction of the scene.<sup>187</sup> The more things are stripped down, the more they double. The prisoners are of course chained at the legs and necks. We should pause already; the usual translations tend to conflate the effect here. Bloom suggests, “so that they are fixed, seeing only in front of them, unable because of

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<sup>185</sup> Ibid., 52-3.

<sup>186</sup> Plato, *Sophist*, 252.

<sup>187</sup> “What,” says the teacher, “if we take even this away? And this? Then what will you have learned?” What are multiple choice tests but the last reduction, “signed” by the student: “Yes, given this scene, we agree there is nothing left but this answer.” The multiplication and gathering of questions—how is it that we don’t find this collecting itself odd?—as well as of answers, are in the service of the desert, the stripping bare of true proliferation. What would remain to be asked is whether the “essay question,” the “term paper” and so on, aren’t in some manner simply themselves substitutions. Apparent victories. What persists, even more barren, is the empty placeholder itself that confronts every teacher: *something goes here...*



the bond to turn their heads all the way around.” But if these two functions are no doubt related, we should note the specificity: legs and neck, each to their function. Notice the singular “bond.” Fixed in place, facing forward *and* unable to turn their heads around. Plato leaves nothing to chance. Enough, and just enough:<sup>188</sup> 1) in place, 2) unable to turn the head.

To what effect though? Having reduced the movements of the body, Socrates immediately details a parallel reduction: they would not have seen themselves or each other; they would not have seen the actual things being carried by; discussion would take place as if the shadows were what was being named; and if there was an echo then they would take the sound to come from the passing shadow. “Then most certainly,’ I said, ‘such men would hold that the truth is nothing other than the shadows of artificial things.’” It is easy to run through this, it trips right along. But we should pause long enough to note two things: first, how systematic it is as a reduction, as if it knew precisely what needed to happen, and second that the outcome—*Then most certainly*—is a precise inversion. And it is here that we see the eerie effect. The bonds are, depending on how you look at it, doubled, or made irrelevant. Over time the chains themselves grow tired, one with flesh, forgetting to be locked.<sup>189</sup>

We are, in fact, about to begin the third pass which will play out the implications of this, as if sorting out the different variations on the perverse cliché, “the best prison in the world is the one...” Where what? Where the prisoners don’t *know* they are in a prison? Where

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<sup>188</sup> We know, of course, of the resourcefulness of prisoners (and students): a spoon will be turned into a knife, an old radio turned into an apparatus for a tattoo that will turn into a battle line, that will be the death of civil society. Plato has to be careful, place the bonds *here* and *here*. And nowhere else. Don’t give them an inch, but do it with restraint. Is this not the logic behind the common classroom wisdom passed on to new teachers, “Don’t smile before Easter/Christmas”?

<sup>189</sup> There is a moment in Pina Bausch’s dance, *Café Müller*, where the “setter” will arrange and place a women in a man’s arms, leaving only to rush back when the man drops her, starting the sequence over. In the apparent opposite of chains, the pace quickens until the frantic moment when the setter becomes irrelevant, the woman frantically arranging and dropping herself to the floor.

the prisoners don't *want* to leave? The two are strangely interwoven. But before we follow along too quickly, let us, like devious prisoners, hang back. Because in this third pass, for the first time, the notion of a path is doubled (we should recall the lateral path/wall along which the objects are paraded.) and turned into a journey (which itself will double.) But, like recalcitrant students, we might first have something to learn about how the path operates by not taking it, by willfully choosing *detention*. "What are you going to do," the too clever student always presses, "expell me?!" Hanging back, or pressing ahead, what the student is feeling out is that the way in which the perceived limit is simply a turning point: *Then most certainly.—Now consider....*

Is it that the petulant student knows that one needs a gap, a differential, a discrepancy? Beware the student that is always on time, always hits his or her mark. We should bear this in mind, laggards that we are becoming, since in the next pass we can already see that it is a setup: given the rigor of the second pass, then 1) wouldn't they need to be compelled to move, and 2) wouldn't they lag, accustomed to the conditions behind them?<sup>190</sup> We can see it coming. Isn't this what Plato has been trying to preclude with any manner of constraints, preferring to walk us through it on time (if only to demonstrate the lag)? The prisoner tends to know the drill, how things will go. Plato is dead on, of course: legs and neck. It is enough to preclude movement of the head in relation to the environment. But this isn't what Plato is interested in, any more than a teacher cares, as such, that you sit in your seat. This is simply the mechanism for the more essential reduction. The mathematician Henri Poincaré, at the turn of the twentieth century, confirms what Plato is banking we will suspect:

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<sup>190</sup> "Don't you suppose he'd be at a loss and believe that what was seen before is truer than what is now shown?' 'Yes,' he said, 'by far.'" (515d)

It follows that sight and touch could not have given us the idea of space without the help of the “muscular sense.” Not only could this concept not be derived from a single sensation, or even from a series of sensations; but a motionless being could never have acquired it, because, not being able to correct by his movements the effects of the change of position of external objects, he would have had no reason to distinguish them from changes of state. Nor would he have been able to acquire it if his movements had not been voluntary, or if they were unaccompanied by any sensations whatever.<sup>191</sup>

A motionless being could never have acquired the idea of space: Depth. We are in over our heads, or without a sense of a head, a mere head, bereft of sense: it is in the depths that we lose a sense of depth. This is our plight. Plato and Poincaré may be right, and we should not be too quick to dismiss it—the apparatus of schooling, chairs and classrooms (and we could say, by extension the techno-beaurocracy that governs the third pass, the ways in which the flow of students is moved through it,) is precisely the evidence that it can effectively and consistently mute our sense of depth; that is what it is for—but it is still a *strange* tale, this motionless being. We should take secret stock. Isn't there is always a second, secret register, a second set of books, in prison?<sup>192</sup> What *else* do we still have, once everything is systemically stripped away? If we are to regain a larger range of freedom, effect an escape, it is only by being willing to squeeze into spaces and experiences deemed impassable. You don't riot, tossing the chairs out the windows, you stage a riot as a diversion for something altogether more subtle: you don't address the problem at the level at which it appears.<sup>193</sup>

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<sup>191</sup> Henri Poincaré, *Science and hypothesis* (New York: Dover Publications, 1952), 59.

<sup>192</sup> *Shawshank Redemption*, problematic in so many ways, is nevertheless an exemplary account of the mythic structure (precisely too accounted for), of redemption and the dream of shining the light on prison. In it the duplicitous warden is tripped up by the switching of books. And likewise we see the function of objects, either tucked away, or hiding their true function behind another.

<sup>193</sup> This is the mistake of most of the current approaches to delays in motor development. The standard path of development is perceived as a series of milestones around which the discrepancy is measured. Constraint therapy will put a sling on an arm, forcing the patient to sort out the less adept one, much

Our secret, non-Platonic, inventory then, in this pass of the guards, would include the following contraband. First, an instinctive wiggle (the child pinned to the floor and unable to roll over, never mind crawl, is constantly generating variations, whether we can make sense of them or not).<sup>194</sup> Plato attempts to pin the prisoners from birth, but we come out on the move. To do otherwise is to be still-born, the oxymoron indicating death. This brings us to the second contraband: we are good with constraints. They organize our movements. The child learns to crawl and walk by being pinned to the floor. If you have ever tried to hold onto someone who doesn't want to be held onto, you can feel how constraints transmute into leverage. Even a developmentally challenged infant that is unable to find the larger movements of the body and limbs, will muster their resources to find some sort of leverage—a differential of breathing that relieves a pressure or turns into a sound, a movement of the eyes or tongue that pulls the head off to one side. It doesn't take much to make a difference. Motor learning was long

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the way students used to be forced to write with their right hand. But this is in some ways simply an extreme variation on the notion of patterning. Put them through the proper motions until they become learned. The more sophisticated technological innovations can even modulate around this pattern, increasing the level of work the patient must contribute to bring about the step, but they are still suspended in a robotic contraption walking them relentlessly down the well worn twin paths marked on the treadmill by previous patients' shoes—the approximation of movement. There is only the measured work of compliance around the illusion of an upright stance and gate. What the therapist must actively suppress is anything, in their own sensation as well as that of their patient, that would indicate movement organized at a subtle, sensory level that is not oriented around a milestone.

<sup>194</sup> The classic experiment in this, performed by Esther Thelen, demonstrates the flaws in the linear models of motor development and cognition and suggesting the relevance of Dynamic Systems theory to movement. Babies come out kicking. But in a very rhythmic pattern, as if in preparation for the movements of crawling and walking. But then eventually the pattern seems to wane away, before finally reappearing and contributing to sorting out crawling. But *where* did it go? Did the baby unlearn and then relearn it? Thelen's experiment was an exercise in simplicity: she would take the infants in whom the movement had waned and suspend them in water, whereupon the movement would spontaneously robustly re-emerge. The increase in the weight of the limbs had simply surpassed the strength of the muscles to manifest the movement. Here's the question: did the movement ever stop? Not that old body mind dualism that would simply chase the movement back into "the brain," but did the movement, the organization and reorganization of the whole weighted, feeling infant ever stop? Esther Thelen and Linda B. Smith, *A dynamic systems approach to the development of cognition and action*, MIT Press (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1994).

distracted by the problem of “degrees of freedom.” (How do we process all of the variables that would need to be controlled for?) Freedom is rather a plague to a moving system. Movement is a differential, a shifting pressure. A little bit this way or that. A bond will generate that as much as a pathway. A shifting tassel—everyone in their place—suffices in place of individual hoodings. But above all a gesture is required, a movement, however subtle.<sup>195</sup>

Left or right. This is our next clue. For all its occlusion of perceived depth, the cave has width. It arrays itself—“*its long entrance open to the light across the whole width of the cave*” (514a). Plato is careful to keep the prisoners from seeing themselves, shoulder to shoulder, but their shadows themselves spread out to face them. So, what then? Do the prisoners take it in as a still field? This seems hardly believable. Anyone who has been to a movie theater knows that it matters where you sit, that you will turn your head, that your eyes will track the moving image.<sup>196</sup> Do their heads have a limited range, or do they shift their eyes? Shifty-eyed, either way, because what does this indicate but a resistance to simply facing—the eyes giving away the suppressed movements of the whole body, a discrepancy or differential between the minute movements of the eyes and that of the body’s orientation—a secret lag or speed in turning.

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195 In this sense we would seem to be close to Žižek’s speculation here, while differing completely. “What gets lost here is that all of us *are* these people in the cave—so how can we, immersed in the cave’s spectacle, step onto our own shoulders, as it were, and gain insight into true reality? Is it that we should look for small inconsistencies in the realm of the shadows, which provide a hint that what we take for reality is an artificial spectacle (as in the scene from *The Matrix*, in which a cat runs across a threshold twice, drawing attention to a glitch in the functioning of the Matrix)?” Slavoj Žižek, *The parallax view* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2006), 162. Žižek is right to be non-committal to this reading, paradoxically still maintaining the paranoid assumption of “the Matrix.” The question, “what is the Matrix?” haunts the prisoner in advance. But what if the minute variations that we find don’t confirm our plight, the deception—aren’t glitches in the system of shadows which can then prompt one to “find an exit”—but are a sign of our own motility, our facility with difference.

<sup>196</sup> For that matter, even in the frontal and restricted experience of being face to face, we find our eyes scanning, jumping, wandering....

The eyes, we seldom note in our cavernous culture, are the sensitive feelers and initiators of turning. This is one of the great paradoxes of Western culture, largely predicated on a facility with the gesture of reading.<sup>197</sup> Shifting the eyes in a series of jumps, from left to right, turning quickly, and then shifting again—we find ourselves straining, in need of glasses, which further prescribe the eyes movements (creating a fixed and central focal point within a frame.) This further indicates the specific challenge of *understanding* these gestures by following them precisely when they seem to go underground. Here, precisely where the repetition of the cave has proliferated in books, chairs, classrooms and screens, where Plato suggests we are pinned, we also find the most fine tuned of minute turnings, shifty-eyes. The judgment of ocularcentrism misses the point that it is hardly the ocular, but the *centric*, this reigning in of left and right, that is at work. But likewise, this revised judgment also potentially hides as much as it illuminates. The critique of the ocular, which is just another way of saying this long history of *dualism*, does not so much unveil it as replicate it, reinforcing the gesture.<sup>198</sup> The proper task for a monist is not to critique dualism, but to find all of the ways in which this differential emerges within a single substance. What is it that we are doing with our whole selves when we are behaving like fixed eyes/I's?

In this sense, we could hardly agree with Plato more—even then, in its infancy, before we picked it up as the definitive line of educational *techne*, the problem writ large was the context that makes it difficult to turn and to notice the loss. We could, and should, even read Plato more carefully as *not* suggesting the cave as a model for learning, as a pedagogy of

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<sup>197</sup> We should recall Socrates' deep suspicion of that dangerous supplement, writing, and in particular its way of *fixing* things across time.

<sup>198</sup> This whole ocular apparatus serving not to valorize looking, but to distinguish two modes of moving in relationship to vision: chained and freely.

turning, despite how it is taken up. It is as if Plato has quite astutely already acknowledged the second aspect of Poincaré's formulation. It is not just that sight (and touch) alone will not give us depth, that a change of orientation, of turning and movement through space are required. Something else remains, "Nor would he have been able to acquire it if his movements had not been voluntary, or if they were unaccompanied by any sensations whatever." Is this not at least partially Plato's point in this story of education *and the lack of education*: look, even when you drag them they lag dangerously behind.

### **Dragging, reflecting, switchbacks, vantage-points**

Now we are moving. Or so it seems. Having discerned the suppressed dimensions of movement within the apparent stillness, the illusory play of movement of the second pass, it is time to play catch up. We are already behind and things are on the move. Or rather, *one of us* is on the move. The third pass:

"Now consider," I said, "what their release and healing from bonds and thoughtlessness [ἀNow con] would be like if something of this sort, *by the course of nature*, to happen to them. Take a man who is released and suddenly compelled to stand up, to turn his neck around, to walk, and to look up toward the light; and who moreover, in doing all this is in pain and because he is dazzled, is unable to make out those thing whose shadows he saw before." [515c, emphasis added]

By the course of nature. φύσις. Naturally. We should recall Anaximander here. But why? What is natural about this release, healing, and compulsion? It is almost as if Plato wants to suggest that this change emerges out of the normal course of things. If you find yourself in a cave for all of eternity, a *perpetual* prisoner, from birth, and frozen in time, *even then*, things will turn around for you. You'll catch a break. There is frequently a scene in prison movies when the

prisoners' cell door just opens, followed by a pregnant pause to let it sink in. A cell door not meant to open, in the natural course of things, of course must open. Just as, in a moment, the shadows will be replicated above ground, rehearsing the whole hierarchy again, it seems as if there is a ghostly double of the sun below ground—not just the fire, but the *pull* of it: “This is the yielder of the seasons and the cycle of the years, and is the steward of all things in the visible place, and is in a certain way the cause of all those things he and his companions had been seeing” (516b-c). The sun yields, or hands over, the cyclic movement of time, and is even the cause of what goes on underground. Such as a yielding up, a compulsion to stand, an orientation of looking? Perhaps. But we are getting ahead of ourselves. For now we should simply note this preliminary phase.<sup>199</sup> Released by nature. Looking up, perhaps, walking even, but not yet ascending. Plato will take this moment to establish the profound disorientation and discomfort of the prisoner, the pain and turning away. Got it? “So he would,’ he said.”

Now the third pass really gets moving. “And if,’ I said, ‘someone dragged him away from there by force along the rough, steep, upward way and didn’t let him go before he had dragged him out into the light of the sun, wouldn’t he be distressed and annoyed at being so dragged?’” (515e) At first simply freed, mulling around, compelled even to stand—*two legs in the*

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<sup>199</sup> All of these stages that are about to come rushing in the text of course are a plague to the commentators, who in frustration at not being able to line things up cleanly with Plato’s divided line, with a staged theory of knowledge, in good Platonic form simply take their aggressions out on the irrelevance of symbol, myth, and imagery. This unsightly remainder. We find, in the footnotes to the Jowett translation, these gems: “It is probably a mistake to look for a definite symbolism in all the details of this description. There are more stages of progress than the proportion of four things calls for. all that Plato’s thought requires is the general contrast between an unreal and a real world, and the goal of the rise from one to the other in the contemplation of the sun, or the idea of good,” and “But Plato never leaves an attentive and critical reader in doubt as to his own intended meaning. There may be at the most a little uncertainty as to which are merely indispensable parts of the picture. The source and first suggestion of Plato’s imagery is an interesting speculation, but it is of no significance for the interpretation of the thought.” We should, however, treat this gesture seriously, this Platonic reading of Plato. If for no other reason than that it is what seems to repeat itself, as if it were the *drive* behind the retelling, this assured confidence it affords an “attentive and critical reader.”



*afternoon*—but still perhaps in the course of things, the prisoner is not yet going anywhere. The course only really gets underway when “someone” drags the prisoner along the “rough, steep, upward way.” This is, in fact, the first mention of such a path.

Until now we have only had the triple orthogonal of the back wall, the puppeteers’ wall, and the opening of the cave itself along its length. Three elements that we have, as if presuming the divided line, assumed to be perpendicular to the plumb line of the cave. The only movement in the second pass, was *along* the orthogonal: the play of shadows the parading of objects. But it would seem now that we have two kinds of paths, 1) a plumb-line or a ray of sun that is picked up by a fire and bounced directly off the orthogonal wall, the ascent to Athens, a steep and rough upward way, and 2) the ridge line, the barrier wall, the line of traversal, the contour line that neither ascends nor descends and whose path is determined by this characteristic. Isn’t this too neat though?

The walls protecting Athens—and along which the torch races were being run for the festival of Bendis, goddess of the underworld, imported to Athens (by way, no doubt of her port), the context for this whole telling—don’t run orthogonal to the line between Piraeus and Acropolis; that is, it doesn’t block the road, it protects it. The two walls, one to the North, the other to the South, quite the opposite, defend a corridor between sea and height. Do we not have two modes of orienting *along the same path*? The back wall of this *theater* is only the sea to the extent that the sea is the porous closure of the wall that in some sense encircles the path between the two levels of the city—a line, we might say, that acts as both contour and plumbline, depending. A line orthogonal to itself, doubling back, once a path, once a wall, once climbing, once flattening out. Or, a path that the lower it goes, the more it flattens, approaching the sea.

Could we say that this is the strange Platonic gesture, the divided line is a line that turns back on itself, is both rough and steep, a kind of impasse, involving multiple hesitations, multiple about-faces, as if wending its way, but in such a manner that it itself appears to run in a straight line from shadow to sun? It is not just that Plato is able to pivot the *sense* of the line, its vector away from the shadowy wall of the sensible toward the eternal truth of the sun. The paranoiac reversal: leap out of old alliances, project a new line to the limit, with yourself as the intermediary. Start from the bottom, from zero. Only this is Plato's efficiency: zero is not nothing, but the remainder. By straightening out the line, reducing its wanderings to a roughness, a steepness, he is able to simply flip it end for end. The entire mythic, cosmological, and cosmogonic topology is intact. Truth is not where you imagine it. You are facing the wrong way at the wrong time.

Made to look at the light you will turn back and flee. Dragged up, you will be blinded by the light. There is thus a strange link between the compulsion of force and turning. Dragged up along a line, the prisoner will oscillate between directions, varying with the height and intensity of the light. First he would make out shadows, then the reflection in water, then turn towards the things themselves, then up from things to the heavens, first at night, then by day, then the sun itself. We have already noted how the stages serve to draw out the function. The prisoner does not, cannot, see everything at once. (Unlike us? We should not forget to keep asking this.) But this looking back also serves as a kind of test. It is present as a motif in multiple tellings of downgoing and reemergence. *You must not look back*. We could say that this is one of the essential elements of these sacrificial journeys. One goes down to retrieve someone who has died (prematurely). But to come back bearing your "gift" you must pass a test. Orpheus, for example, is allowed to return with Eurydice, on one condition: he must walk

in front of her and not look back. Persephone, abducted, dead prematurely, is finally allowed to leave, but having failed the test, having eaten the underworldly pomegranate, she must return each year. In any case, there is always a stage or a test. Often, as Penglase indicates in early Mesopotamian variations, there is a pattern of “initial defeat, help asked and received from the upperworld or the place of origin, and then victory.”<sup>200</sup>

It serves, of course, on one level as a kind of dramatic tension, delaying the resolution. But what is that saying? Is it not that it is precisely in this gap that the essential sacrifice is made. One does not sacrifice oneself by descending into the underworld, but in the debt above and substitution below that one accrues in bargaining for the impossible. “It is the ascent that is the important thing; anyone can descend. Indeed, in ascending Inane achieved what, it appears, nobody had ever before been able to do—to rise again alive.”<sup>201</sup> She is the first, but of a long line of singular individuals. And not without cost. A substitution is demanded, Dumuzi, and then this substitute descent will be repeated annually as an assurance of fertility for the city. In any case, something gets left behind, if only your memory—a kind of self enforced forgetting. One must not look back to the past, or one must control one’s desire. Only then can you have what you want.<sup>202</sup> We can see here the sacrificial gesture of substitution. You can see

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<sup>200</sup> Penglase, *Greek myths and Mesopotamia: parallels and influence in the Homeric hymns and Hesiod*, 20.

<sup>201</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>202</sup> We might think here of Odysseus’ trial, attempting to return home, and encountering Circes. She turns his men, all snuffling instinct, into pigs. But many-turned Odysseus, always finding the weakness to be exploited, discovers that by resisting Circes he wins her directly, and not just the illusory lure. The only trick is that his human form is kept at the cost of learning to suppress instinct. She turns out to now want what he no longer cares to give. Horkheimer and Adorno, often savvy to the notion that the paradox is not resolved by ourselves looking back, to a simpler time, nevertheless also often dream of it. For them this story marks a new trajectory: “In the transition from legend to history she makes a decisive contribution to the bourgeois chill. Her behavior puts into effect the ban on love which later became all the more powerful the more love as ideology was obliged to dissimulate the hatred between the competing partners. In the world of exchange the one who gives more is in the wrong; but the one

if you are willing to give up seeing, you can have things if you give up shadows, the heavens if you turn from things. Conversely, if you show a vacillation or variation, turning back you will turn to stone, or a pillar of salt. Are not the prisoners themselves so fixed, or transfixed? This whole pass serves to straighten things out, taking a whole series of switchbacks and weaving a single orientation out of them. Early variations on the descent and ascent structure often have multiple stages in which a test or action takes place. We might pause to ponder our current educational system, one of the most sedimented of structures being the notion of levels and grades. We will have to turn to this in a moment, seeing if we can't lay it once again up against a whole series of threads around the story of the Minotaur, and in particular how the upward journey is codified and smoothed out. But first we should see if we can follow the twists and turns with our heads down. In particular we should begin to track what is at stake in this verticality, this peculiar notion of turning.

### **Turning Bodies, Radiant Corpses, Grasping Hands and Whispers in the Ear**

In light of this paranoiac machine and tomb-like bodies, and given this motif's centrality to the birth of the discipline of Philosophy, Jacques Derrida seems justified in posing the question of the teaching of Philosophy as a question of fear. In *Who's Afraid of Philosophy?* He

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who loves is always the one who loves more. While the lover's sacrifice is glorified, the making of that sacrifice is jealously enforced. It is precisely in love itself that the lover is incriminated and punished. The inability to master himself and others demonstrated by his love is reason enough to deny him fulfillment. With society, loneliness reproduces itself on a wider scale. The mechanism operates even within the tenderest ramifications of feeling, and love itself, in order to have contact with another person at all, is forced to assume such coldness that it shatters at the moment of its realization." Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of enlightenment: philosophical fragments*, 56.

begins his analysis of the teaching body by posing the condition of paranoid space: “Here, for example, is not an indifferent place”<sup>203</sup> But this apparently casual example is more than an example. Or rather, to the extent that the space, here, now, is subsumed as interchangeable, one example among many, space will continue to be homogenized according to the axiomatic law of the line. The body becomes secondary to this law, merely a mechanism of distribution along the line:

The body becomes teaching and exercises what we will call, even if it means complicating things later, its mastery and magistrality only by playing upon a stratified erasure: in front of (or behind) the global teaching body, in front of (or behind) the corpus taught (here in the sense of philosophical corpus), in front of (or behind) the sociopolitical body.<sup>204</sup>

If we think back to the odd situation that Derrida evoked in *The Post Card* of Plato standing and looking over the shoulder of a seated and writing Socrates, we can see the odd spatial transmission of paranoid knowledge.<sup>205</sup> The signs are in front of us and the truth is behind our backs. It is not the Sun, however, that conditions our fear. It is too far away. Something is going on right behind our backs, something is looming, and while we can be warned, as if in a dream, we find we cannot seem to turn our bodies around. The paranoid quandary: we are facing the wrong way, we cannot face what we must face. We are reduced, if it is even possible, to glancing over our shoulder. Someone is dictating something in our ear. Whispers. This much we are told: the object, the mechanism of deception is right here in the cave with us, just behind us, demanding a new order. This proximity is both the sole cause for

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<sup>203</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Who's afraid of philosophy?: Right to philosophy 1* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2002), 68.

<sup>204</sup> *Ibid.*, 90-1.

<sup>205</sup> Jacques Derrida, *The post card: from Socrates to Freud and beyond* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

worry and the necessary condition of transmission. The privileged but casual example. The everyday sneaks in under our defenses.

Heidegger, for his part, will begin his extraordinary lectures on the cave allegory by making sure that the students have reason to be concerned, calling into question that we know what knowing is—a properly Platonic beginning. Again we will find an offhand and proximal example: “What for example, is a table?”<sup>207</sup> *This table, here*, he no doubt indicated. If it turns out that this example which just stands around, close to us, is suspect, if its truth escapes our scrutiny, we are also compelled to ask the question of whether the essence of a table and the essence of truth amount to the same thing. Nothing is so clear. It is however, the making problematic of what is close that serves to generate our interest:

[I]n so far as we want to linger over and further examine this incomprehensibility, that it has become *worthy of questioning*. We must first of all ask how it comes about that we quite naturally move and feel comfortable within such self-evidences. How is it that the apparently self-evident turns out, upon closer examination, to be understood least? Answer: because it is too close to us and because we proceed this way with everything close.<sup>208</sup>

To be sure, it was no doubt hardly worry over the table that kept the students for Heidegger’s charismatic lectures on the cave. The offhandness of the example ensures its replaceability, but it also serves to distract us from understanding what is so compelling about the teaching of philosophy. It should be noted that what is being bracketed out, by posing the task of philosophy as Heidegger does, is the ability to move about comfortably within the self-evident. This is the double gesture: work with, challenge what is at hand, but reduce it to an example, remove it from reach. One must look *over* the table. Thus we return to where we started.

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<sup>207</sup> Heidegger, *The essence of truth: on Plato's cave allegory and Theaetetus*, 1.

<sup>208</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

Weren't we overlooking and looking over the table to begin with? Everything resets, but nothing is the same. Someone is whispering your ear: *don't let on*.

Thus all of this is yet within the logic of the specular, accompanied by its odd displaced voice. Each example brought to our attention as an object within our field of vision posed either as problematic or magisterial. Derrida (less modest than Heidegger, or more willing to be a mere example, no matter how radiant) emphasizes this: "My body is glorious. It gathers all the light... Then it is radiant and attracts all eyes. But it is also glorious in that it is no longer simply a body."<sup>209</sup> But such a transformation must also be deadly for the teaching body: "This capture by erasure, this fascinating neutralization, always takes the form of a cadaverization of my body. My body only fascinates while playing dead, the moment when, playing dead, it is erected in the rigidity of the cadaver: stiff but without strength proper."<sup>210</sup> This is the teaching of Socrates on the threshold of death, making a scene, an example, a spectacle of his body by acting as if it were already dead. But Derrida will end here, still within the space of spectacle, even if he is posing its mechanism as problematic. It is Irigaray who suggests what ought to have been obvious, but has been covered over by the barrenness of the philosophical narrative: we must walk around the cave.

However, this is the impossible, paranoiac, condition of the cave: one cannot move *and* one is in the wrong position. Assuming, of course, that one is the prisoner, hearing voices.<sup>211</sup> We should note this odd displacement. In the first pass, the voice is taken to come from

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<sup>209</sup> Derrida, *Who's afraid of philosophy?: Right to philosophy 1*, 90.

<sup>210</sup> *Ibid.*, 91.

<sup>211</sup> Although, we should note, insist even, that the returning "teacher" also discovers the difficulty of movement, is himself displaced, out of place, *a-topos*, strange. Returning to his seat, he finds he no longer fits in, is in no position to do anything.

shadows themselves. We can only imagine that even their own discussions, if they were even able (VII, 515b), would come to them from the back wall. This is the trouble the freed prisoner brings back with him. He speaks from within their midst, but he also introduces the very notion that this midst has a secret depth, something behind their backs. He speaks, we could say, into their ears, bypassing the eyes. The eyes and ears, arrayed as they are so close, tend to work in tandem to orient. But up close the discrepancy is great. A loving whisper in the ear or a gadfly, an angel or devil on the shoulder—each will elicit a different response, but based on its intimate proximity, too close to turn and *see* without displacing yourself, (*legs and neck*).<sup>212</sup> This is what the returning “teacher” introduces, as a discomforting threat. We should note this odd addition that happens in what we could call the fifth pass. (Having descended and taken his seat again, pass four, he then turns to *telling* the story of the third pass, his emergence.)<sup>213</sup> The fifth pass is auditory. Something is wrong, however. In theory, things should simply reset, his voice should simply return to echoing, seeming to be about the shadows. The only difference being that *he’d be bad at talking of such things*. Laughable. Still, the remaining

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<sup>212</sup> The double chains at first seem excessive, especially when there is no *perceived* reason to turn or leave, itself doubly oriented by eyes and ears. But when these are called to differentiate themselves, we see the necessity for a captor. If the prisoner can *turn and step*, the response is recalibrated, but if one is precluded then the response is discomfort. In a horror movie, the terror is that one can turn to see the looming figure but not move, or one can run but not turn around.

<sup>213</sup> It is tiring, this pretending to go in order. Is not this part of the exhaustion of schooling? Eventually things begin to slip. You get ahead of yourself, forget where you are, repeat yourself, introduce something too soon, or assume that you’ve mentioned something that you haven’t. *Oh, who was I telling?...* On the other hand, how exhaustive is it that we are always standing back, knowing in advance the whole story, only pretending to go through the motions. Hegel, the story goes, wrote the *Phenomenology of Spirit* in about the time it would take to write it out longhand. Naturally? Or, if the prisoners of the cave are “like us” do we bother to check what this feels like, what moves we might have, or does innuendo suffice? But how far ahead we get: we know already that Plato is recounting the whole dialogue after his own decent and reemergence. The auditory pass, the retelling, follows the moving pass yet again. But yet again we encounter it out of order: we pass our eyes over the text, forming an inner dialogue, in which we are asked to imagine a moving pass that happened prior...



prisoners do not in fact take this to be the case, rather assuming that his spatial journey is real, that the depth exists, but that it is corrupt, inverted. Beyond laughter this is the threat that emerges as the irruption of depth itself within their midst:

Laughter, and wouldn't it be said of him that he went up and came back with his eyes corrupted, and that it's not even worth trying to go up? And if they were somehow able to get their hands on him and kill the man who attempts to release and lead up, wouldn't they kill him? (517a)

The whisper irrupts, interrupts, but what it brings is movement and spatiality itself. Or rather, it troubles things by adding a *new dimension*, a new line. One more approximation of movement. Things can be moved, but the only non-compelled movement is downhill, or inner city—the inexorable pull of gravity. Is even this of our own free will, or hasn't Plato made a point of it: it's simply the path of least resistance, a line of flight that seems to happen of its own accord—*according to nature*, we might say.

No. That is bad enough. This spatial arrogance. *Let me tell you of the travels I have made.*<sup>214</sup>

And as Plato points out, it hardly works. What is more troubling, more *fascinating*, is something

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<sup>214</sup> This is the perpetual danger for teachers: “Let me tell you...” We should not imagine that this is the opposite of the exclusion of the personal—and the power that comes with implying more or less that one exists only in this virtual form—but its twin. It is present even, and especially when it tries to not tell but show. The “Field Trip,” that strange parody of the outside, an enactment of escape, can be seen as a kind of strange remedy for the *parochialism* of students. But school itself can be seen as a kind of supplemental trip, a world. *We can put the field right in the school*. Nevertheless, or likewise, teachers will often lament their student's limited horizons, their *hoodiness*, we could say. Or their impoverished sense of the cosmos. This is ironic given the school building is itself one of the prime nodes of the local. One goes to school *instead*. “in order to illustrate ‘the narrowness of the real Paris in which each individual lives . . . within a geographical area whose radius is extremely small,’ he diagrams all the movements made in the space of one year by a student living in the 16th Arrondissement. Her itinerary forms a small triangle with no significant deviations, the three apexes of which are the School of Political Sciences, her residence and that of her piano teacher.” Guy Debord, “Theory of the Derive,” in *Situationist International anthology*, ed. Ken Knabb (Berkeley, CA: Bureau of Public Secrets, 2006). This is the difficult tension: on the one hand this registers as a kind of impoverishment (oriented around the node of school) and loss. On the other hand, the judgment itself runs the risk of being equally dubious, in the way an urbanite may find a small town creepy: an unsettledness masquerading as knowingness. The challenge, perhaps, is not so much to be more worldly, but to pack fewer bags: “Academics’ lives are seldom interesting. They travel of course, but they travel by hot air, by taking part in things like

that seems to slip in in the process. “Seems to” because Plato seems to have his guard of the hypothetical up more than usual, as if wary of the addition. We could easily pursue this odd doubling—they are *like* us—through to any number of hypotheticals, from Descartes’ own projection of a “test” human rather than an actual human, to Kant’s *als ob*, the virtual simulation across the gap between free-will and deduction, finding its way into the simulation run of the categorical imperative: proceed *as if* it were natural; act *as if* it were universalized. But we would run the risk of seeing this as an ocular doubling, a splitting of images, missing that the split always creates a kind of material division, or a splitting off of the material other, a corporeal or corpse like being. We are like them to the extent that we are like our own corpse. This is the strange undeadness that Plato is calling out. Plato’s distance is thus double: this is a kind of image, a scene, and they are like us, but it is also plagued by a kind of uncertainty, as if, even though it is an image of his own making, he’s not at all sure what such a hypothetical double is capable of. Although Socrates will model, on his own deathbed, with a deft certainty, what a body should look like that is merely a tomb, left in advance, he seems deeply uncertain about what an undead creature, a dead body in which something *like* life lingers, is and is not capable of.

So he says, after suggesting that the prisoners would reject the upward path as desirable, “if they were somehow able to get their hands on and kill the man who attempts to release and lead up, wouldn’t they kill him?” (517a) It’s *as if* he isn’t sure whether they have hands, whether they would work, what they could grasp, or what their range would be. What

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conferences and discussions, by talking, endlessly talking. Intellectuals are wonderfully cultivated, they have views on everything. I’m not an intellectual, because I can’t supply views like that. I’ve got no stock of views to draw on.” Gilles Deleuze, *Negotiations, 1972-1990* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 137.

are we to make of this irruption of the grasping hands of the denizens of the underworld?<sup>215</sup> He will close off this dangerous striking range almost as soon as he opens it, not speaking of arms or hands again. But doesn't this at the very least speak to a whole range of movement, between that of the upright spinning shell or turned prisoner and movement at a distance, in space, the dragging of a prisoner, the turning of a ship. Instead we always get false turning. This we could say is the unsettling unspoken discomfort of the prisoner. If you are turned without being able to actually twist, or reach, you get vertigo. The pilot, hooded while someone else manipulates the plane, when unhooded and given back the tiller will feel a deep disorientation as a result of sitting still and passive, while moved in space. The plane will not be pointing where it feels like it is. The wobbly handoff. This exercise's primary goal is precisely to point out this discrepancy, this failure of sensation. Do not trust what you feel, look at the instruments. Nevertheless, this differential actually elicits a constrained twist, even if it can't go anywhere. The twisting, for example, you can feel in your seat watching a horror movie, where you are both constrained by the space, and nevertheless finding yourself in some kind of motion. A response to a discrepancy, a differential. We should think here of Odysseus, bound to the mast of his ship. A single binding this time, not legs *and* neck (ears): bound but with ears unplugged. How he must have twisted, no? The price for hearing desire. Meanwhile, those under him would have their ears plugged, hands on the oars—no twist, just circling while facing frontally.

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<sup>215</sup> And without getting sidetracked from this question of materiality, movement, desire, and violence, what does it mean to kill someone who is already living *as if* they were dead? Is there a difference between how these prisoners are *like us*, in the sense that we too are in that position, and how we are *like them*, in the sense that coming from the surface we try to take our seat again, but instead set off alarm? Is it not just that there is a dualism, or a division: body and soul, us and them. It is that in each the double is echoed. The body refuses to die; the soul trains and prepares its radiant corpse. We are like them, but not in the way they are like us.

We should see and register the difference. Even when a teacher chooses to sit in the same circle or at the same table, with the same chair, there is a suppressed but real difference. The teacher is the one who *could* twist up and out, move around in this near zone, seize someone, or take the floundering helm. This is recognized, even insisted upon, even when it becomes a point of resistance. That we ask to be constrained is itself an act in this range. What, though, are we to do with our hands, with our bodies if not constrain them, or still them as a sign of a true freedom? The very materiality of schools is in response to this capability of ours: *idle hands*. It is as if, in order to deal with grasping hands that we situate this whole complex: screen/board, free-floating teacher, table, chair. The very hallmark of schooling being the *table-chair*. It is enough to evoke the rest. (We will not speak of heels. They are too much.)<sup>216</sup>

What do we have? Yes, an ocular apparatus, but one which serves to establish a forward, sedentary position, in which the hands, “*if they were somehow able,*” are constrained by the legs and neck. Of course, if asked, anyone can approximate the “proper posture” of learned attention that the shape of these chairs suggests—but only for a moment, and until we forget. But the force of the bonds is such that it hardly matters. You are free to twist in your chairs. Indeed, over the course of a class a whole cycle of compensations will likely repeat itself over and over without our being particularly aware. The idealized form is not the opposite of slouching—witness Rodin’s *Le Penseur* replicated on campuses everywhere—but a virtual double playing out in relationship to a whole material complex that both suggests and precludes it.

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<sup>216</sup> For an initial foray into this terrain see: Chris Moffett, "The emperor's new toes: fashioning the modern stance," *Ecogradients*(2011), <http://ecogradients.com/post/6411569779/>. On chairs, one can begin with: Galen Cranz, *The chair: rethinking culture, body, and design* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1998).

The *Le Da Costa Encyclopédique*, Fascicule VII, Volume II, appearing without comment in 1947, begins mid-sentence, and somewhat more oddly, no prior or later volumes ever existed. This fragment differs from the everyday familiarity of the encyclopedia format in at least one other significant way: rather than imagining itself for the reader as an ordinary account of things worth knowing, it proffers “definitions” of those things that are already taken as known, releasing their sense from constraints of the format. Given this turning of the acquisition, archiving, and transmission of knowledge against itself, we are perhaps fortunate, therefore, that Fascicule VII, Volume II covers *Echecs—Extase*, if for no other reason than it may then include the briefest of entries for *Ecole*, devastating more for what it doesn’t deem worth including of such a typically over-determined place. The entry reads, in its entirety: “An establishment where people are taught that it is forbidden to make use of both hands, the left having no right, even when it is more adroit than the right.”<sup>217</sup> Only one hand: this is the constraint. But the Surrealists are a bit extravagant. Let us turn to the more sober Kant. Diane Morgan, points to Kant’s odd fascination with hands, suggesting that this gesture indicates a kind of hubris, a reigning in of space to our own index, the body with its own right and left.<sup>218</sup> In other words, Morgan suggests that Kant’s error is to give the hands a grasping role in space:

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<sup>217</sup>The play of words is even more over the top in the original French, linking “adroit” and “right,” but we will see that it is the unspoken homonym “write” that converts moving both right and adroitly into law. This literary intervention was the work of a group of Surrealists including, prominently, George Bataille. Georges Bataille et al., *Encyclopaedia Acephalica: comprising the Critical dictionary & related texts* (London: Atlas Press, 1995).

<sup>218</sup> We might also recall a similar, perhaps more powerful citation: daVinci’s Vitruvian Man, which has become emblematic for an enlightened humanism, a symbol of centrality and health. What is so often missed, partly due to daVinci’s deft skill at pulling it off, is that he is in fact solving a much older problem posed by the Roman architect Vitruvius. One, we should note that is predicated on spreading the body, splaying it in the most suspended and pinned of ways. DaVinci’s other engagements with the human form invariably return it to a more dynamic, grounded sense.

Kant seems to assume the natural human right to dominate and command creation. He then goes on to adapt the distinction between right and left testified to in nature for human, all too human, purposes. It becomes a tool strategically used to privilege right-handers against left-handers and one type of writing against another. Kant prioritizes the right hand by claiming that it is undeniably privileged: “The right-hand side enjoys the undeniable advantage of dexterity and perhaps also of strength over the left-hand side.”<sup>219</sup>

What if the problem is not that Kant has found the phenomenological debt that our sense of space has to hands and bodies, or even centralized it? Nor even that he puts it to this “all too human” purpose of suppressing exceptions: “That is why the earth’s population is right-handed (if one puts aside the few exceptions which, like the handful of cases of people who squint, do not upset the generality of the rule corresponding to the natural order.)” It is true that Kant is always sidestepping this opportunity to learn something from the exceptional. But what if, even in this case, the point isn’t so much to privilege or exclude a group, but to establish the distinction itself. As the *Encyclopédique* would suggest, this is the proper work of schools. Indeed, the only way to distinguish right and left is to find a consistent marker, one of them being social agreement.<sup>220</sup> We could say that this discrepancy between sides, is a kind of insistent, constrained turning. A gesture: we are never simply right or left handed, but are “right handed” to the extent that we are always moving to the right, handing to the right. Half constrained. The saccadic eye running across a text from left to right does not move in the same way as the cicadic move resetting back to the left. Morgan is right to point out that this is the Kantian gap: “The left and right hands can never complement each other; space cannot

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<sup>219</sup> Diane Morgan, *Kant trouble: the obscurities of the enlightened* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 42.

<sup>220</sup> Try for example, to *explain* the difference between right and left, without resorting to an assumption of the distinction. “Well, which hand do you write with...” means nothing other than we will link writing to an assumption. Likewise, with the *reading* trick of saying, “Look at your two hands, with splayed forefinger and thumbs. The one that forms an “L” is your left.” “Right...” says the dyslexic.

close in on itself to bridge the gap between the two hands.”<sup>221</sup> But this gap, this cleft or chasm, is not so much the failure of a handing off, but a consistent gesture, itself practiced over and over. One hand anchors the page, the other writes, dragging from left to right. The recognition, now, that being left handed is not simply an moral or animalistic failing, but simply a difference (for which “lefties” will still endlessly compensate to match the materiality of the built and written environment), is perhaps simply an indication that the vector itself was not what mattered, since we are constantly being asked to imagine inversions. Instead, it is the range or arc that matters, the subtle twist that locks things in place. An excessive stillness.

Already, the hands are being reigned in, here in the cave, but they will have endless tasks to do within this minimal arc. Indeed, it is the mastery of the arc, this smoothness, that will stand for the hand’s disappearance. The greater the development of this mastery of the hand, the more it will become a technique itself, interchangeable. Between Plato and Kant we would find Descartes, for instance, whose hyperbolic or excessive doubt involved a radical restriction of what was allowed to appear before view. And Alongside this *practice* of doubt, which we should not be too quick to think merely took place in the mind, we also find a whole practice of polishing and smoothing the arc, until we see dream of an inverse relationship between clarity and the presence of the hand. Graham Burnett’s *Descartes and the Hyperbolic Quest* uncovers an abiding and engaged if “hands off” interest—he was always writing letters to craftsmen, detailing what they could undertake—in devising a machine for the making of a hyperbolic lens that would be vastly superior in clarity and resolution. One goes further, sees

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<sup>221</sup> Morgan, *Kant trouble: the obscurities of the enlightened*, 42.

further, better, by refining and polishing this small arc of glass—Focus.<sup>222</sup> These machines would be based on proper optical principles rather than emerging out of the artisanal craft, developed by feel and endless trial. Descartes' hyperbolic contribution to this elusive quest for the hyperbolic lens was to subsume the precise, practiced moves of the artisanal hand into a machinic apparatus itself. Burnett writes:

The illustration systematically omits references to the craftsmen who would presumably operate the system: the crank on the grinding wheel (the only visual allusion to the machine's need for human attendance) is tiny and obscured; there is no indication of the need for a craftsman to advance the lens blank [...] and there is no space for a worker to stand in order to perform this task. Unlike the tradition of mechanical illustration rooted in the late Renaissance theater of machines—where mechanical devices were literally “staged” in scenes and depicted in use, attended by their operators—Descartes' machine stands alone.<sup>223</sup>

It is not, as is often imagined with Descartes, that he dismisses the body. Quite the contrary he submitted it to excruciating study. It is that the body itself is mechanized. The mind itself also must be submitted to the principles of proper architectural construction. The hand is removed from the picture by perfecting and automating it, a repeatable machine for polishing a hyperbolic arc.

As in Plato's cave, there is no place to stand. One does not wander around the cave. Everything is in its proper mytho-mechanistic place. The possibility of changing one's position

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<sup>222</sup> And we should note, as well, how this already, endlessly looks backwards, taking on a historico-mythic dimension. That is, this drive towards focus through *techne* is itself perhaps not so clear, we repeat it as an extension *and* surpassing of a mythic origin. Hyper-bolic. Burnett cites “the mythic parabolic burning mirrors erected under the supervision of Archimedes to defend the city of Syracuse from besieging navies” as becoming “iconic for optical craftsmen, intimating their noble forebears and potent abilities.” D. Graham Burnett, *Descartes and the hyperbolic quest: lens making machines and their significance in the seventeenth century* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 2005). Descartes' hyperbolic contribution to this elusive quest for the hyperbolic lens was to subsume the precise, practiced moves of the artisanal hand into a machinic apparatus itself.

<sup>223</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.



must of course be allowed in theory, but everything must be carried or dragged, along precise if elusive routes. Descartes will deliberately speak of a “tendency to move,” rather than motion itself. Just as Descartes’ endless pursuit of a refined hyperbolic machine, continually goes nowhere, Plato’s allegory while seeming to show the workings of education reveals the work of fixity.

### **(Counter)Rotation and Deception: A Coin Trick, A Shell Game, A Fleet of Ships and Sheep’s Bellies**

Chains, lines, perspectives oriented strait ahead—all maintain the illusion of constant motion in one direction. Forward. The cave cannot be explored in the round, walked around, measured in the round. Which means that the men stay there in the same spot—same place, same time—in the same *circle*, or circus ring, the *theatrical arena* of that representation.<sup>224</sup>

Here we find that it is the motion along the line that is the illusion, not the parade of objects moving across the cave. Lateral motion is the originary (illusory) but actual motion of the cave, and it is the transition upward and back, forward and down, that escapes us.<sup>225</sup> Yet this is precisely what is at stake. Flipping from side to side is not enough, we must reorient ourselves. Socrates says, “[T]his wouldn’t be the twirling of a shell but the turning of a soul around from a day that is like night to the true day; it is that ascent to what is which we shall truly affirm to be philosophy”(521c). He is likely referring to the children’s game of *Ostrakinda* in which a shell painted black on one side and left white on the other—night and day—is spun, and depending

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<sup>224</sup> Irigaray, *Speculum of the other woman*, 245.

<sup>225</sup> *Ibid.*, 247. Dreaming of upward mobility, we spend our days tracking our eyes left to right, left to right...

on how it lands the black or the white team will chase the other.<sup>226</sup> Both teams begin lined up, and the game begins as they disperse. Capture involves carrying the captor on one's back. Such frivolity and haphazard movement, Plato seems to be suggesting, have no place in Philosophy.

It's not that he doesn't admire the well turning disk of night and day. On the contrary. No, the suspicion would be that it's the equal fun that will be had either way, night or day. The spinning disk is an exemplar of well ordered turning. We should recall the cosmological myth that Plato has the stranger "set down alongside" the quest for the Statesman, in the dialogue of that name. (As we insert ourselves here, we might simply take note of the running thread of sewing and cloakmaking that is serving as both content and metaphor for the discourse itself.) We can only follow along briefly before returning to our previous course. It is an account of the cause of the ancient story that claims that at a previous time the sun rose and set on opposite sides than which it does now. Let us slide in alongside the course:

The god himself at times joins in conducting this all and guiding its revolving course, and at times he just lets go, whenever the cycles have obtained the limit<sup>227</sup> of the time appropriate to the all, and it then given over to itself to turn around spontaneously in the contrary direction, since it is an animal and has obtained as its lot intelligence from him who in the beginning drew it together. (269c-d)

Where to begin? As the stranger himself notes, the transitions, these handings over, are a turmoil—one reason to say "the all" rather than "the universe," because as things are picked

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<sup>226</sup> Cf. *Phaedrus*, 241b: "when he was ruled by his former folly: now that he has regained his reason and come to his senses, lest by doing what he formerly did he become again what he was. He runs away from these things, and the former lover is compelled to become a defaulter. The shell has fallen with the other side up; and he changes his part and runs away; and the other is forced to run after him in anger and with imprecations, he who did not know at the start that he ought never to have accepted a lover."

<sup>227</sup> Μέτρον: the (due) measure, proportion or length. But also a limit or goal. Interestingly in this nautically soaked context: ὄρμου μέτρον: 'the measure of anchorage,' or the distance off shore a ship might be cabled.

up in the other direction they do so in stages of proximity, getting twisted. The image is of a fleet changing course: first the helmsmen/demiurge will let go of the handle of the rudder, withdrawing to his survey-post, then the other gods, in their regions will follow suit in turns. Only these are no ordinary ships, at the mercy of the weather. We could say, the weather itself, the stormy or fair condition of the universe, is *like* ships. Finding fair weather, all together now this animal turns backwards, guiding itself *like* the hand of one who fitted it together. Its trouble is its corporeality, its corpse-like tendency, and forgetting over time, it will start keenly, with a single motion and in a single place, eventually bursting into disharmony, mixing contraries. Eventually the craftsman, in concern will return from his post and place hand on rudder, twisting it firmly around, keeping it from being lost and dissolved into the limitless sea. Right, so are we sufficiently spun around? We should see woven together here, yet again, a mythic theory of turning, this time taking the season variability of the height of the sun and finding one more axis of rotation, complete with a cycle of variability and order. But we also see the strange difficulty of the sea, the limit of corporeality itself. We do not so much float on it, as spin ourselves up out of it or dissolve into it. The all is *like* a fleet of ships, which are in their essence the turbulent sea itself. But we also—and here is why this detour perhaps lends something to hand for our inventory—find an interesting relationship between things seized up (the hand is always there but oddly occluded), the spinning of things along an axis and in place, and most interestingly a whole theory of distal and proximal effects, twisting in relationship to each other caused by the hands taking up a course. Hands, we could say, seize and reorient, but to allow for the picking up of rotational speed as order. But should we note two different kinds of hands and reorientations. The hand of god (which will show up in countless paintings of the Medieval Period, detached, floating in the margins, steering,

indicating) when it takes things up establishes order, and the twisting is the result of the failings of the corpus. But the animal, taking itself up, proximally, is both backwards and lacking a steady hand. The true chaos is in the handoff, the twist.

Let us now let go the rudder and spin back the other way, back where we came from: the *Ostrakinda* and the grasping hands of the prisoners. Perhaps now we are in a position to suggest that Plato's real concern with the spinning shell is double. As we said already, it levels the direction, making no distinction between the value of light and dark. But just as importantly, when it stops, it is not picked up again and set spinning by a hand. Instead all hell breaks loose—a sea of running children. It's not that they are facing the wrong way—that is perhaps workable. It's that they run every which way, at the same time, grasping after each other, and enjoying it. Never mind that the game itself mimics this reset, dragging everyone back to the line, and eventually spinning again. The danger is in lagging behind in this variable, animalistic, movement that starts in close and then twists its way out to the limit. Indeed this is prefaced by the wobble of the shell itself. The stranger made a point of this: as the animal slows down “at the final moment of time ancient disharmony bursts into full bloom.” The shell, unlike the cosmos, does not itself move relative to itself, a heaving sea, but as it winds down, there is always that wild moment when it *seems* to behave like a fluid. The signal, more than the arbitrary color, for the children to disperse in the interim. Destruction. The demiurge looks on *like* Plato, in perplexity and anxious concern.

As a child or tightrope walker will tell you, although being upright is a prime quality for spinning, one does not turn so easily on a line. Lines are meant to be run away from, not precariously turned on, which is what makes it a circus act. The suggestion that this turning around is the sole legitimate move is what is deceptive, not the lateral flow of objects. To

follow along, unperturbed by this smooth story, is the danger: “The only risk you run is of finding yourself at the end more cunningly enslaved than at the outset. Understudies in a mime that you yourself confirm.”<sup>228</sup> If this tale of learning has found movement to be deceptive, it is the positing of a changing of position without it that itself deceives us.

In order to step out from this impasse we would have to think another possibility for understanding deception, one that would restore the actuality of movement to its place in our experience. What perhaps struck Glaucon as so strange about the image, before being calmed by Socrates, is the idea of creatures who do not move. Rather, movement is a commonplace. To live is to move, as Descartes’ example of the beating heart confirms. To be prisoner from birth is to be stillborn, already dead. If movement has been linked to deception, what would be called for would be not a bracketing out of free movement, of the children’s spinning shell, but a phenomenology of movement itself, to see how it can be learned. Such a phenomenology, however, would need to understand movement not as that which happens in front or in back of us, but primarily by us.

Maxine Sheets-Johnstone, in *The Primacy of Movement*, suggests that what is truly strange is that philosophers have consistently considered movement along the textual model, “which reduces movement to mere visual and/or manual gestures coincident with reading and writing.”<sup>229</sup> Indeed, the life of the scholar is perhaps all too well captured by the image of the cave, of Plato dictating over Socrates shoulder, of Descartes opening and reading the dissected book of the heart. But if we are to avoid mistaking such a scenario for all that is available to us as moving beings, we would need to engage in a phenomenology of the motion of our bodies

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<sup>228</sup> Irigaray, *Speculum of the other woman*, 248.

<sup>229</sup> Maxine Sheets-Johnstone, *The primacy of movement* (Philadelphia: John Benjamins Pub., 1999), 135.

themselves. Which is to say—to the extent that this actual movement of bodies has been systematically linked and reduced to either vacillation or deception, to fear and fraud—what is needed is not a new theory of movement (to be ascertained how?), but a phenomenologically based practice of deception.

Rather than taking as its model the paranoiac starting from scratch, and given its concern for issues of deception, such an approach would have to not only overcome its prejudice against the body, but its prejudice against the movement of deception as well. In doing so we might tap into the ready resource of a whole tradition of phenomenological descriptions of the process of learning how to deceive. Magic, in the logic peculiar to paranoia, has never ceased speaking, writing, teaching, and perhaps above all selling, its secrets. *‘I will tell you, but only if you promise not to tell.’*

Let one example suffice—or rather, one practice. Philosophy, fond of its allegories and thought experiments (“what if...”) tends to shy away from actually engaging with the mechanisms of such “illusions,” just as it tends to shy away from actual bodies, (and actual humor.) As a cursory example of how such a resource can allow us to rethink not only Philosophy but the basic question of what it means to learn, let us suggest a trick. But rather than being a trick to be performed in the circus ring of the spectacle, let us actually look to the experience of movement in executing it.

But first, the setup. A bit of pseudo-history to serve as backdrop: The cave allegory, appearing to be a reveal of the mechanisms, the whole circus tent of a context, of an illusion, actually tricks us into thinking we have seen how things work. This is, however, one of the classic misdirection’s of magic, distracting an audience by appearing to explain or reveal what

is happening, while actually using this as cover for the essential deception. We will see this play out in the trick to follow quite directly, but we might likewise be suspicious of the “patter” of Socrates. This “revelation as misdirection” is in fact, ubiquitous, and ancient. After our practice run with a coin, we will try it again, this time for keeps by seeing it at work in the trick Odysseus plays on the Cyclops. But for now, follow along:

### **The Disappearing Coin Swallowed by the Third Wave**

1. take a coin and a pencil (your wand) one in each hand. Close the coin in a fist and tell the audience to focus on it intently so that they will see the true nature of the coin. Indicate to the audience that the coin will disappear on the third tap of the “wand.” (It is the third wave, we know from *The Republic*, which will drown out the possibility of the ideal city, and a classic iteration in magic for multiple reasons.) 1-2-3...
2. But on raising the pencil for the third time, instead of bringing it down, without losing a beat lodge it behind your ear facing away from the audience, bringing down your empty hand instead. Act surprised. Chastise the audience for focusing on the wand and not the coin.
3. You have fooled them. Now here’s the tricky part, you let them in on the mechanism of deception: turn and betray the trick by pointing to the pencil, *at the same time as you place the coin in your far pocket, away from the audience.* Misdirection. The reveal as cover.

4. Now, sheepishly reclaim the pencil, resume your stance, (feigning the coin being in your fist), and proceed with the *trick from the beginning, as if everything were the same, but this time carrying through and simply showing your hand as empty this time.*

What is to be learned in this little charade? First, as we said, it highlights how deception can itself be the opportunity to make deception work. Second, everything takes place along a (divided) line, complete with cave/pocket/fist. If the spectator were to move around, the trick would fail its effect. Third, though—and it is the third wave that drowns us—if you have actually performed the trick, because it is precisely a trick and not an allegory, you will note that for all its apparent simplicity it asks you to do something rather strange feeling indeed: you have to find a way to turn and point with one hand at the same time as you put your hand in your pocket. You will feel the strangeness immediately, but to define it more clearly try this: Just put the coin in your pocket and notice what you do with your hip. Does it want to move forward or backwards? Let that go, and now point to your opposite ear with the other hand and feel what you do with the same hip. The two everyday movements are most likely calling for a different use of the same parts. In order to learn to do the trick then, you must find a way to organize a complex movement of differentiated turning. Deception involves not the simple parading of objects behind our back, but more fundamentally a facility with turning.

What allows this effect to work is that you now “know” something that the spectator likely does not: that such a movement can be done easily. This knowledge, however, is felt bodily. It must be learned, and is the real reason behind the deceptive maxim that the hand is quicker than the eye. Nothing could be further from the truth. But our habitual skill in reading



the world visually tends to contrast strongly with our ability to make differentiations in larger movements. We thus have a hard time feeling what must be possible in order to make the trick work, and attribute it either to some unperceivable speed or to “magic.” A well-versed magician watching another, however, will have little difficulty “knowing” what is happening even if their eyes cannot see the coin being furtively deposited. If the ability to move, or rather the ability to learn to move differently, is the first condition of deception, it is also the first condition of knowledge. A phenomenology that takes this into account would find itself refining the experience of moving in all its complex possibilities, rather than trying to avoid the appearance of movement, fixing everyone in their place, orientation along a line, and revealing deception—all the very conditions of deceit.

Let us follow it one more time. Odysseus, introducing himself to the Cyclops, Polyphemus, dissimulates, saying he is “Nobody.” Much has been made of the significance of this deception, in particular the way in which he lies by telling a more essential truth, that the subject *is not*. The cave is us. Still, this is an odd thing to say, until one realizes, much later—when the Cyclops, his eye poked out and screaming, and his fellow Cyclopes ask who did this—Polyphemus answers painfully, “Nobody did this.” Clever Odysseus. Except what a long shot, or a tall tale, this must have been—as if we think so poorly of monsters that they would fall for such an obvious and weak ploy. Is this a profound truth, or does it not distract us from the more essential sleight, one not of patten but of bodies navigating the unexplored undersides of space? What is fascinating about this version of a cave exodus is that rather than some absurd test being measured up to, “don’t look back,” Odysseus relies on introducing a more nuanced

sense of space itself.<sup>231</sup> It's not that there isn't a filter, but it is navigated differently. Having poked out Polyphemus' eye, Odysseus and his men strap themselves under the sheep, so that when the inevitable daily cycle begins—Polyphemus letting his sheep out to pasture, but this time feeling with his hands to make sure there are no human riders—they ride their way to safety. In a way we could invert the usual reading, suggesting that the word-play deception was really merely a kind of patter to cover the more essential physical deception. With this we would find, rather than some semblance of turning, coercion and adaptation, a sensitivity to process, to the animality of front and back, to differentials of space, and responsiveness to the perceptions of others. What would happen if we had organized our educational practices around this kind of spatial and embodied intelligence as a way of thinking about caves?

Instead—and we will have to follow it—Plato spins us the other way around, articulating an educational space in which the proximal movements of our body, twisting around and differentiating themselves are dangerous deceptions. Properly speaking we could say that for Plato a well spun body no longer has protuberances but resembles more and more

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<sup>231</sup> This is what seems to bother Adorno and Horkheimer so much: he finds a back way, he sneaks through. He's a cheater. Is this today not the last bastion of self-justified rage in academia? What is it that gets the hackles up around something like plagiarism, for example? One always gets the sense that the outrage, while seeming quite specific, is actually a result of a dislocation. Is it that the student is not who they agreed to be, (a breach of ethical code) or not who they agreed to be like (a breach of the group), or who we would prefer them to be (a breach of our desire to reenact)? Or is it that they are the breach itself, this disruption of the coherence of space that allows all of these modes to go on? Odysseus perforates Polyphemus' head, but also the cave itself. He both plays along, and turns things upside down. With plagiarism we are confronted with both our selves and our rituals. The student gives us what we asked for, without giving us what we desired. And in so doing we are confronted with the strangeness of our desire, the way in which it can turn under us. We ask for something specific, we emphasize it, mark it, reinforce it. We aren't sure even why we are asking. It is not because we expect the answer. The student tells us what we would prefer to forget: that we don't speak for ourselves, that we ourselves are behaving like somebody else, that we expected them to find the interest in something where we ourselves have perhaps substituted a show of interest. That things never begin. That there is no end in sight... It's not whether any of this is right; it's that the transgression lets go a series, which is often given life as a rant. Or the most professional of closures. But in any case responses to turbulence. It finds a different, revealing, way out.

a pot spun on a wheel. We should follow this to see where it takes us, because amongst other things, this will be the test by which he sorts out the learning of philosophical discourse from the false turning, the persuasion of the Sophists.

### **Your Body Leaks, Your Speech is (not) Impressive: Plato's *Gorgias***

SOCRATES: Then if the inflow is great, must not that which runs away be great, and must not the openings for this discharge be large?

CALLICLES: Certainly.

SOCRATES: Then it is the life of a Charadrios that you are describing, not that of a corpse or a stone (*Gorgias*, 494b).

The Charadrios (χαράδριός)—a bird which gets its name either from its natural habitat of streams and torrents (χαράδρα), or its habit of excreting while it eats or drinks—is no doubt a poor place to begin pouring over such a fine dialogue as Plato's *Gorgias*. We might, as will Socrates in a moment, blame the absurdity (the 'grotesqueness' as Emlyn-Jones, not without cause here, would have us translate *a-topos* as it appears a moment earlier in the text) on the noble orator Calicles. Surely Socrates has a more fitting discourse in mind and has had to follow the torrent, resorting even to persuasion, however ironically, to plug up the leaky exchange. We would do well to pass through, for the time being, this moment of coarse imagery and intense word play unlikely to make an impression. We should recall that the story of the Charadrios arrived thus:

SOCRATES: Will telling any number of such myths fail to sway you?

CALLICLES: That's nearer the truth, Socrates.

SOCRATES: Come then, let me tell you another story. (493d)

Is this not the most intractable moment to enter into the dialogue, with Socrates resorting to persuasion, Calicles evoking the truth, Socrates disregarding it, myth overtaking logos, and

instead of the owl of wisdom we find Socrates calling Calicles a bird prone to excretion? Has the dialogue finally reached the beginning of the end, turning itself over, dumping its contents every which way?

But it is also here that the question of entrances and exits is taken up seriously and explicitly *as a subject* for the first time. It is as if it has taken this long to finally address the problem with which the dialogue began: Socrates—and perhaps Philosophy herself—has arrived, as the Greeks would say, “too late for a feast,” or perhaps too late to do one’s duty in battle, but perhaps at just the right time to press an advantage. In fact, Socrates will move into the properly philosophical question, *ti esti*, “what is,” as if nothing were amiss, pressing on (447d). To be sure, later he will chastise Calicles for wanting to skip over the proper initiations (497c). Yet each major change in opponents—for hindsight will surely show that we are at war—will be marked by the protestation that it is Socrates himself who has forced things along too quickly, shaming his conversational adversaries into false concessions. It would no doubt take a close and *conservative* exegesis, line by line, to demonstrate who is truly at fault for this failure to bring the conversation to a fitting and agreeable conclusion.

But in order to judge would we not have to measure it against some other possible dialogue, perhaps the very image of dialogue itself? But, this is what makes this dialogue so critical. Here, amidst the threat of caricature, impasses, or rampant floods, we see the critical interplay between a conception of space and bodies and a mode discourse. In particular we see the way in which this interplay is put to work not just to instantiate a spatial notion of the path to truth but a particular way in which the new *body* of this inquiry will flow. That is, under cover of crude jests, we will see that rather than the body being freed from the cave, it is in the rhythms of speaking that Plato will immerse us. The body is a kind of speaking vessel. Or

speaking is *like* a flow between vessels. But what kind? It is precisely the very conditions of speaking together that are being contested moment to moment in the *Gorgias*. At what length may one speak, and in the service of what? Is it by way of question and answer, or of speeches, that we are to continue? Philosophy or Rhetoric? The dialogue continues before it can even be agreed upon how to continue. Or perhaps it is equally true to say both that the dialogue continues *because* agreement cannot be found, and that the dialogue will not truly begin as Dialogue *until* agreement is found. The closest reading, pouring line by line through the dialogue, would continually be confronted with this necessity and impossibility of moving forward. A scholarly reading, in heeding the call for cleaving closely to the text, for a *conservative* reading that attempted to hold onto everything that came to hand, *no more and no less*, would at the same time exceed at every moment the actual dialogue as it unfolds.

Nevertheless, what merits reading the text through the lowly opening of vessels and birds? Etymologically one could make a case that pouring over a text is intimately connected to pores, but are not such word games when Socrates is at his least philosophical? But this is precisely the challenge that this moment in the dialogue poses. Philosophy distinguishes and extricates itself from Rhetoric—finally speaking for itself—at the moment when it is least Philosophical, in the sense of holding together the *logos*, and most strange or out of place, as it tells myths. But if there is a site, neither completely closed off or flowing, out of which Philosophy will form itself as a conservative vessel, it is *not yet* philosophical. We should recognize the inversion already, everything is facing the wrong way; the ordering demiurge picks up the tiller at the height of decadence; the mythic stories of birth are told in the cemetery by the sea. But what happens in that moment of turmoil? Is Plato simply picking up the ordered course of educational discourse, setting it back where it should have been. Are the

openings of dialogue, through which the flow of words threatens to overflow, a temporary result of its not yet philosophically initiated participants not knowing how to stem the tide? The inevitable fumbings of a philosophical coherence struggling to find itself through its unlikely, recalcitrant students? Or are the openings real moments of uncertainty, negotiated between individuals who come with different expectations and understandings of *how* one is to interact? Or is there something else going on in the twists and turns of this tense engagement? Could the dialogue have found another coherence, another outlet? No doubt all the participants would be familiar with the strange logic of contest and debate, the *agon*, in which participants come together as equals but in which one will nevertheless prove greater. Despite the protests of the crowd, maybe one should agree that Socrates has shown up fairly for war, has entered and continued appropriately—“in good faith,” we might say today—only to prove the greater.<sup>232</sup> Perhaps, according to this reading, it is both true that it could have gone otherwise (a match of equals) and also that it was inevitable, nonetheless, that Socrates would have the last word (the superiority of philosophy.) But, again, by what criteria, on what terms, would we judge? By now we may begin to see these terms are being shaped up by Socrates himself within the rush and stoppages of dialogue: we will judge by the flow itself, by the ways in which dialogue moves and is contained. Thus it will be within this context, introduced and elaborated from within the stream that we will determine the victor of the battle. Indeed,

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<sup>232</sup> Although we should note that the apparently level playing field, the give and take of dialogue and the *agon* presented within the *Gorgias* is somewhat misleading unless one remembers the not unbiased hand of Plato, and the larger stage upon which the Dialogue itself was competing. The ambiguous comedic aspects of the dialogue, both biting and self-deprecating, are worth noting—especially since so under-appreciated by a modern scholarly reading—as situating the *Gorgias* within larger theatrical, literary, and polyvocal agonistics, in which the victor was somewhat more elusive than the dialogue itself might imply.

Socrates will continue to take advantage of the strange logic of the contest, squeezing through openings only to shut them behind.

Let one example, of legion, suffice: “So I will pass through the argument myself, as I imagine it to hold, but if any of you imagine that I am not in agreement with myself, you must take hold in turn and set it upright” (505d-506a). Socrates is insistent on this point, even a war-hawk, demanding that all be “lovers of strife” (505e) in testing the argument. *Vigilance. Keep your eye on the closed fist.* This stridence, even as all his previous attempts have brought them to this point in the dialogue, reaches its peak, ironically, at the very point when each of his interlocutors has refused to keep pace any longer and he must speak in agreement only with himself. Yet Socrates will pass through the argument one more time *as if* all have agreed to contain any outflow: “Listen then, but first I will take hold of the argument again, from the beginning” (506d). Thus he will be able to both plead not knowing where he stands, and that the argument is held fast and fettered by iron and adamant (508e-509a).

Again, we might imagine that Socrates is speaking so coarsely merely because his interlocutors are poorly initiated into higher matter such as justice. To bridge the gap Socrates would speak metaphorically: a house must be well founded, and so also a body, and so also a soul. “If we are to be consistent” (504b) we might expect the same of an argument. But does what legitimates moving from body (σῶμα) to house or tomb (σῆμα) then allow us to move to the sign (σημα) as text and to a history of reading closely? In the *Cratylus* Socrates will indeed make this semantic leap explicit, but here, in the *Gorgias*, is Socrates not merely being playful? Isn't the goal merely to show that the soul, far from being committed to a body or the written text, may be well ordered and just or poorly ordered and unjust?

In order to show that this word play around vessels, bodies, and birds is more than a tangential matter it would have to be shown that justice itself conformed to the strange logic of vessels, and that the semantics of the text is itself committed to the same logic. Again the *Cratylus* will make explicit what remains operative but unspoken within the *Gorgias*:

SOCRATES: Some say [the body] is the tomb of the soul, their notion being that the soul is buried in present life; and again, because by its means the soul gives any signs [σημαίνῃ] which it gives, it is for this also properly called ‘sign’ [σημα]. Probably the Orphic poets gave this name with the idea that the soul is *undergoing punishment*, literally ‘being given justice’) for something, and that the body is an enclosure to keep it safe, like a prison, and this is, as the name itself indicates, the prison for the soul *until the penalty is paid.*” (400c, emphasis added)

According to the Orphic poets, then, the body is not merely *like* the soul, but is the means through which the soul is entombed and imprisoned, *in order to give it justice*, and by way of signs. If we are to recognize justice then, it will be by way of the body and the manner in which it gives signs of punishment. This detour through the text of the *Cratylus* might be justified, then, if we can locate a similar impression in the *Gorgias*, “for if someone strikes, something must be struck” (476b) And indeed, in the *Gorgias* we find the soul like the body, and the performance of justice on the soul like that of the doctor on the body, leaving a similar impression that there is a specific relationship between justice and the tomb or vessel of the body. But what exactly is this relationship?

If we were to pass through the argument of the dialogue again, we might find that the philosophical question, of what is the essence of what a rhetorician like Gorgias does, begins to turn around the question of what relationship rhetoric has with justice. But what is justice? It would appear that we recognize it by how it transforms us:

SOCRATES: And he who is punished by paying the penalty receives justice?  
 POLUS: Apparently. (476e)



To suffer justice is to receive the imprint or undergo the effect of giving what is owed. But what is owed is justice. In fact there would seem to be no currency or medium of exchange. One pays for justice by undergoing justice. One does not *possess* justice, one has *become* just. If we are unjust then we are entombed in our bodies and justice is owed. The body thus serves to indicate a price to be paid. But the price, in turn, is not possessed, because what is owed is justice and we are unjust. Rather, for justice to be paid we must become just. But in paying our due are we also released from injustice. Are we thus released from our prison, the body, and the sign? In attempting an answer to this we might think here of the *Phaedo*, but let us stay the course and look to a similar paradoxical logic directed at the vessel of Callicles' own body, on the verge of being pronounced dead.

In response to Callicles protest that, "at that rate stones and corpses would be happy" (492d), Socrates will begin the Charadrios section of the dialogue with these words from Euripides:

Who knows if to live is to be dead,  
and to be dead, to live? (492e)

A vessel is most just when it is solid and this is the most happy state, wanting nothing. But by a double gesture it is the just person who is the least vessel-like and most freed from imprisonment. If Socrates is turning things on their head it is not to leave them there, in an interminable questioning of whether one is dead or alive, but to use the suggestion that what appears to be most alive, the flowing body of Callicles, may be the most dead and inflexible. He does this, though, not by attacking inflexibility, but by assigning it a double role: a vessel must be strong, to hold it's contents, but Callicles must also hold to his position strongly, in order to test the worthiness of Socrates' argument by opposing it.

There is, therefore, an essential paradox: On the one hand, the more philosophical one becomes, the more iron clad ones arguments, and the more solid one's vessel. On the other hand, the more philosophical one becomes, the less one knows, the more one interacts with others, in question and answer, to find the truth. The more just one becomes the less entombed, freed from being a vessel at all, able to continue flowing through an argument without being stopped before the conclusion. The more just one becomes the less one may be inflicted with injustice. Likewise, the more unjust one is the more one suffers and is entombed by injustice. But also the more unjust one is the more leaky one's vessel, and the more one flows, unable to keep to a position, forgetful, and rash, and must constantly work to keep things flowing in. Not only, as will be claimed against Socrates (481c), are things turned on their head, but now they would seem to constantly spin around.

### **An Interlude on Single Streams and Multiple Grooves: The Augean Stables, The Nuremberg Funnel, Dewey's Irrigation, and a Politics of Shit**

We should permit ourselves to alter the course here, away from this insistent flow of the *Gorgias*, before meeting up with it again, if only to spread out these *judgments* about the flowing of water and the solidity of vessels into something more like a series of channels or rivulets. If only to see how this *multiplication* of channels, this dispersal of pressure, is itself one of the ways in which transformation comes about, although ambivalently, of course. A *single* flow of water, for example, is a force to be reckoned with. Hercules' herculean feat is to divert the course of a river, sending it through the cavernous Augean Stables, caked in thirty years worth of layers of shit from immortal (prodigiously healthy eaters, we could say) animals. Hercules, in creating a new groove, cleaving the earth, washes away the filth, leaving the

architecture intact. His cleverness and initiative short circuits time, reverting things to cleanly order in the course of a day, which of course outrages Augers, who refuses to honor the payment/bet. The demeaning task was trickily subverted, and under arbitration the payment stands. But since it was deemed a form of work, and regardless of whether it was actually paid, the *labor* does not count towards Hercules' freedom. A single, massive diversion may clean—and we might think of all of the multiple dreams we have of this cataclysmic flooding, from the biblical (itself drawn from earlier Mesopotamian stories), to the cinematic, and particularly around the imagery of cities—but it also barely seems to change anything. In the biblical story of the flood, for example, it is simply God's judgment that changes, promising not to flood the world again, people of course returning to their sin. Now rather than the world, it is the corrupt city of Sodom that is at stake. It is as if, Noah turning to farming, a new distribution does in fact arise, and the flood is no longer the tool for the job. To localize a city, use fire. Is God simply corralling and refining his target?

Is this not also our model for any number of gustatory metaphors for learning? The Nuremberg Funnel, described by the philosopher/poet Georg Philipp Harsdörffer was a fanciful *mechanism or trick* for bypassing the need for any innate intelligence or facility with language. Things could simply poured down the gullet, or directly into the cranium of the poor or affable student. Today, we of course still speak of cramming, always with the expectation that the point is to trick and pass through the test, but with nothing sticking. Everything passes through, a torrential river of *Lethe*. Except that it may also simply leave us stuck that way.

Dewey, no fan of pooling water, will nevertheless also talk about this tendency for things to get stuck in a rut: "The very operation of learning sets a limit to itself, and makes

subsequent learning more difficult. But this holds only of a habit, a habit in isolation, a non-communicating habit.”<sup>233</sup> In the singular we find a barrier to communication, to further learning—a moat, gutter, or bounding stream that isolates and divides. Indeed the danger is that something will simply take an imprint:

If we think of a habit simply as a change wrought in the organism, ignoring the fact that this change consists in ability to effect subsequent changes in the environment, we shall be led to think of ‘adjustment’ as a conformity to environment as wax conforms to the seal which impresses it.<sup>234</sup>

Indeed, it is as if Dewey is speaking of the shallowest of caves, replacing a story of the geometric and architectural depths for an ordinary narrative that stays closer to the surface, a pedagogy of the plains.<sup>235</sup> In a moment he will introduce the following *scene*:

A savage tribe manages to live in a desert plain. It adapts itself. But its adaptation involves a maximum of accepting, tolerating, putting up with things as they are, a maximum of passive acquiescence, and a minimum of active control, of subjection to use. A civilized people enters upon the scene. It also adapts itself. It introduces irrigation; it searches the world for plants and animals that will flourish under such conditions; it improves, by careful selection, those which are growing there. As a consequence, the wilderness blossoms as a rose. The savage is merely habituated; the civilized man has habits which transform the environment.<sup>236</sup>

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<sup>233</sup> John Dewey, *Experience and nature* (New York: Dover Publications, 1958), 214.

<sup>234</sup> John Dewey, *Democracy and education*, Dover ed. (Mineola, N.Y.: Dover Publications, 2004), 46.

<sup>235</sup> We should not think, however that this is rejection of the imagery of the city. Rather, Dewey saw the rise of the urban as the urgent call to respond and sort out a more relevant educational response. We might suggest that for Dewey, as for so many, the solution to the cities woes was to look out to the horizon and the fields surrounding it. The city would be infused with the plains. We can see this, architecturally in the close proximity of the Prairie School of Architecture to Progressive Education. As Kevin D. Murphy notes, progressive schools in Chicago in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, for instance, represented a kind of inverted space: their interiors taking on the function of an idealized public space in which the city can come together. It is no doubt no accident that we see an upsurge in public parks as well. Architecturally, the long horizontals and breaking of the barriers of the facade do not just intend to represent the prairie externally, but in some way to turn the city inside out. Or rather, outside in. A porous horizon in the midst of the city.

<sup>236</sup> Dewey, *Democracy and education*, 47-8.

What are we to make of this hypothetical birth of civilization? He, of course, is illustrating the difference between habit and habituation, but what is at stake in doing so in this particular way? Of putting one first, followed by a second, that *enters the scene*—is it ever that simple?—of giving us a story of old and new, savage and civil? The real challenge of this scenario is to think the interchange, the turmoil between the two. To set out to completely reconcile the gap, however, to close it in a totalizing scenario, is a decidedly un-Deweyan gesture—a matter of bad faith, we could say, but isn't it rather “poor travel?” The modest work of thought, for Dewey, is to actually traverse between them, and in the process reveal and reconcile inconsistencies and obstacles. That “no two thinkers will travel in just the same fashion” is simply the condition for a myriad of “working connections.” This perhaps might lead to a too smooth notion of how “civilization” enters the scene, as well perhaps generating a too homogenous starting condition, the *non-engagement* of savages, and a hypothetical blank slate. Is this not always the caricature of Dewey, too even... But it might also reflect a willingness for things to be sorted out over time by modest engagements. But above all it sets the scene for a different spatial language of learning, that as we will see, is both distinct from, and also draws us back to, the spatiality of interiors and exteriors, high and low spaces.

While, in addition to paths and gaps, Dewey will speak of penetrating into the heart of nature and will utilize a metaphor of a winnowing fan for the process of refinement, the work itself consistently relies on a distinction between rough and smooth, or intensities and diffusions, to distinguish degrees of difference. When metaphors that do not imply movement along a surface, threaten to derail his project, he responds by sending things down paths again. For example, while borrowing William James' language of perching and flights, he quickly converts the implied height to one of the earth: a threshold or, better, platform or plateau, and

then promptly floods the whole scene.<sup>237</sup> Work, for Dewey, is the overcoming of topological deformations.

Let us start then by returning to the desert. We can distinguish, there, three conditions for constituting a working plain. And we will simply leave open the question of whether these *working strata*, phases or modes, serve the same narrative force as the stages of depth that we have encountered earlier. From the beginning: “A savage tribe manages to live in a desert plain.” We find ourselves somewhere. And manage to live. The savage adapts. This will serve as the first topological condition: adaptability to a plain. Without this the life process ceases, falling below the minimal, savage, threshold of perceptibility. Dewey will continue to reference this fundamental stake in topological processes: one always runs the risk of not being able to proceed at all, to die rather than live. Every plane begins as an indifferent desert. Thus to proceed, minimally, we must conform to the limit conditions of contact surfaces, however they present themselves. The alternative is not, however, an unpopulated plain. Here we find the second condition of Deweyan topology: a surface without minimal movement, adaptation, along it, is not conceivable (and is hence neither plain nor surface.) Dewey will insist on this stark definition of a boundary:

The most that can be said about qualities in the inanimate field is that they mark the limit of contact of historical affairs, being abrupt ends or termini, boundaries of beginning and closing where a particular interaction ceases. They are like a line of foam marking the impact of waves of different directions of movement. They have to be noted and accepted in order to delimit a field of inquiry, but they do not enter into the inquiry as factors or terms.<sup>238</sup>

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<sup>237</sup> Dewey, *Experience and nature*, 214.

<sup>238</sup> *Ibid.*, 203-4.

(Dewey, we could surmise, is not interested in the sea, or ports. His gaze is in the other direction.) There is no plain, then, without at least a savage “managing” or traversing it. It *only* present itself as “intensities and vector directions of movement,” or, more rigorously, as the register of such movement as something to be responded to, and thus calling for perception. “Unless there were something problematic, undecided, still going-on and as yet unfinished and indeterminate, in nature, there could be no such events as perceptions.”<sup>239</sup> Here, however, we run the logical risk of tautological closure: a savage is that which minimally adapts to a desert plain, and a desert plain is that which a savage adapts to. Indeed, Dewey introduces the savage tribe and the desert precisely to suggest the inadequacy of remaining at this topological impasse. As we indicated before adaptability registers as a mere impression, as in wax. Leaving aside, for the moment, the anthropological and topological inadequacy of thinking of mobile tribes in desert environments as emblematic of the genteel tradition of wax seals, not to mention the humiliating reversal of reducing them to *tabulae rasae* that would take the imprint from a signifying *plain*, a third condition is nevertheless evident. Formulated negatively: the deformation of surfaces from movement perpendicular to it does not allow for the creation of new topography. No matter how many times the seal is pressed the graphism remains the same. One never proceeds, in Dewey, by impressing, piercing, digging or burrowing through.

Put positively, surfaces respond to movement across them in a way that alters the conditions for future movement. Organisms are sensitive, but the world is also malleable. “A thing ‘absolutely’ stable and unchangeable would be out of the range of the principle of action

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<sup>239</sup> Ibid., 262.

and reaction of resistance and leverage as well as of friction.”<sup>240</sup> To act in the world is to move in a direction, along a surface, towards an end-in-view, and in the process transform the landscape. While minimally we find ourselves on a plain, to go further we must traverse and thus enter and shape new topological conditions: A civilized people enters upon the scene. It searches the world. It introduces irrigation. Dewey is proceeding cautiously, introducing the least possible topological disturbances. Little changes, but the floodgates are opened.<sup>241</sup>

Movement is introduced, and the plain is irrigated. Water is thus provided as the simple test of a plain’s hospitability to movement. Water is never of interest as a pool or oasis for Dewey. It is relevant to the extent that it strikes up onto the sandy limits, flows down irrigation trenches, or over and around obstacles. Water, when it does not threaten to flood the scene, is a minimal indicator of a plain’s contours. Water either builds or it releases. Back and up, or down and out. When possible it always chooses the later. The directions that are possible, showing themselves as available, are those that pose the least resistance. The paths that are formed by action in turn welcome further travel, which smoothes the way in turn.

We must differentiate now, with this third condition, between plains and grooves. Plains under repetitious use develop grooves: “Apart from communication, habit-forming wears grooves; behavior is confined to channels established by prior behavior.”<sup>242</sup> Dewey will repeatedly mark this formal bare topological condition: *apart from communication*, surfaces that

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<sup>240</sup> Ibid., 64.

<sup>241</sup> Again we should see this odd link of a minimal change with a cataclysmic shift. Noah builds a boat, bringing the bare minimum, a pair, of each animal, and will set about modestly to till the soil. But we could in fact call this the second flood, or the flood itself. These tiny scratches of the farmer, multiplied over and over bring about a radical shift in a way of life, turn the ground itself into a kind of fluid. (And also seeding the conditions for the urban itself.)

<sup>242</sup> Dewey, *Experience and nature*, 214.



are moved along form grooves. Indeed, looking ahead, higher organisms will still share this tendency with water to take the path of least resistance, traveling down grooves that it lays deeper each time. But in particular this is the impasse or pedagogic rudeness of a *single* groove: it threatens to become a torrent. Before we avail ourselves of the tempting ability of higher organisms to get the lay of the land, however, the topological conditions of the groove bear scrutiny. First, the surface folds or wears parallel to the line of movement, holding and channeling movement. Thus it also has minimal depth relative to itself, as well as a rim in which that depth reverses onto a plain again. From the groove we can also thus establish the plateau, higher ground. Again, minimally this condition arises concurrently with irrigation. The desert is irrigated, plants blossom, civilization prevails. In fact, closely following the story, Dewey will suggest, in *Experience and Nature* just this, three plateaus: first, the physical, mathematical-mechanical field of organization; second, life, plants and animals, higher and lower organizations of the psycho-physical; and third, communication, the field of association, participation and meaning making.<sup>243</sup> The desert plain, plants and animals, and civilization. These do not consist of three distinct realms however, but of different levels of organizational complexity. Each successive plateau is grafted onto the prior, not causally, which would imply a “breach” or a “gulf” but according to topological influence and leverage. Indeed each plateau is in turn further diversified by the organizational movement peculiar to each, and has their own distinctive topology. The plateau of the physical, for example, is textured by narrow, external, and simple grooves. If the interactions widen, or if grooves form within grooves, in sufficiently more complex relationships a change in plateaus occurs. “A prior adaptation constitutes a threshold (better called a platform or plateau); what is consciously noted is

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<sup>243</sup> Ibid., 208.

alteration of one plateau; re-adjustment to another.”<sup>244</sup> While not separated by a gulf, a homogeneous field fails to account for significant variations in topological characteristics.

Topological variation however implies more than a groove and a plateau. If several distinct plateaus are discernible it is because there is more than one groove, as well as more than one type of groove. As we move from one groove to many, the possibility of an intersection arises. “Thereby an old habit, a fixed groove if one wishes to exaggerate, gets in the way of the process of forming a new habit while the tendency to form a new one cuts across some old habit.”<sup>245</sup> It is the very tendency to form grooves that also ensures that grooves will intersect and disrupt each other. The walls of each groove threaten to serve as obstacles to another, or to undermine and redirect the regulated flow of movement. But in addition they may supplement and vary each other, finding relatively similar directions or depths, creating wide grooves.

The widening of grooves suggests a new organization, the formation of subtle fields. In the context of motor response, Dewey writes, “The wider and freer the employment of means, the larger the field of sensory perceptions.”<sup>246</sup> This widening pushes back the restrictive walls of the groove, allowing for freer movement. The subtle ties that will nevertheless traverse this field become increasingly difficult to think of as grooves at all. The walls of grooves, threaten to block off flow of movement across the surface, marking a rough, savage, executive type. “It seems quite probable that men of the executive type are those of the least subtle and variegated perceptual field; of the lowest degree of consciousness, having the steepest

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<sup>244</sup> Ibid., 237.

<sup>245</sup> Ibid., 214.

<sup>246</sup> Ibid., 253.

threshold to be crossed in order to induce a state of awareness.”<sup>247</sup> This serves as a challenge to civilized irrigation: “The flood of action at high tide overrides all but the most considerable obstructions. It flows too forcibly and rapidly in one direction to be checked; without inhibition there are no hesitations, crises, alternatives, need of re-direction.” Here we find a topological challenge however. If the force of movement resists all but the steepest walls or thresholds, there would seem to be a call for larger obstacles to redirect, vary, and distribute the flow, lest a canyon be formed. And yet this force is a condition of “high tide.” The very rapidity of movement would seem to preclude the raising of levels unless an obstacle blocked the path. It is the presence of high walls that contributes to high walls. However this might be resolved, it is clear that Dewey is arguing that smooth fields are a higher level of organization. Civilization brings with it regulation, and science, marking the ability to “smooth over the rough junctures, and to form by translation and substitution a homogeneous medium.”<sup>248</sup>

Why then insist on habit-formation as the necessary and natural condition of directed action in the world? Without these grooves or preferences for movement we would be left with a purely smooth field, a frictionless surface, allowing of no contrast. Were it even possible to find a height from which to pour water on such a field, it would simply spread and run off in all directions. So while smoothness and subtlety are desired conditions for surfaces, they must also avail themselves of the connections, ties, and relationships afforded by grooved habits. Indeed, with more such refined connections the qualities of the surface may itself change. Dewey writes, “Communication not only increases the number and variety of habits, but tends to link them subtly together, and eventually to subject habit-forming in a particular case to the

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<sup>247</sup> Ibid., 237.

<sup>248</sup> Ibid., 208.

habit of recognizing that new modes of association will exact a new use of it. Thus habit is formed in view of possible future changes and does not harden so readily.”<sup>249</sup>

With constant movement and varied habit-formation the surface becomes pliable. “By a seeming paradox, increased power of forming habits means increased susceptibility, sensitiveness, responsiveness. Thus even if we think of habits as so many grooves, the power to acquire many and varied grooves denotes high sensitivity, explosiveness.”<sup>250</sup> This is indeed paradoxical, because the surface itself begins to take on the qualities not of another plateau but of crossing the threshold from solid to liquid: “If mind is a further process in life, a further process of registration, conservation and use of what is conserved, then it must have the traits it does empirically have: being a moving stream, a constant change which nevertheless has axis and direction, linkages, associations as well as initiations, hesitations and conclusions.”<sup>251</sup>

Not only, then do grooves take on subtlety in sufficiently finely organized numbers but a different, fluid mode of interaction takes place. The groove-formation of habit is transformed through multiple traversals, eventually changing organizational plateaus until the plateau itself becomes fluid, but its grooved past must be maintained, a fluid with “axis and direction, linkages, associations, initiations, hesitations and conclusions.” Whether these are conditions of fluid communication, or whether they are shaped by the adjoining, rougher surface, is unclear, but these tendencies are required for communication. While not everything is linked, and readily traversed, the potential state between old organizations and new is not a gulf but a “fluid in ceaseless transformation”: “When an old essence or meaning is in process of

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<sup>249</sup> Ibid., 214.

<sup>250</sup> Ibid.

<sup>251</sup> Ibid., 215.

dissolution and a new one has not taken shape even as a hypothetical scheme, the intervening existence is too fluid and formless for publication, even to one's self."<sup>252</sup>

Let us turn around and survey the field. Where are we now? This rushing pass through the tight doors of the Augean Stables, and the acceleration of the Nuremburg Funnel, dumped us onto the plain, where things slowed down and became more diversified. What this alternate route allows us to see is the variability but also the continuity between this modern progressive topology and the ancient narratives, while seeing how what is still at stake is the stratification of different modes of living, different arrangements of fixity and flow, albeit in quite distinct ways. But it also allows us to follow at a much closer level the working of this strange phenomenon in which the ground or container ceases to function as a holder and becomes the fluid itself. The fleet of ships is not bounced by the storm, the rudderless fleet *is* the storm. The grooves of habit, (etched in what besides the earth? Our minds?) multiply into a communicative, transforming fluid. We see also, however this double gesture, in which a particular group or strata is made to bear the qualities of mere impressibility, susceptible to floods, while another represents the very ability to navigate well between them. A civilized people enters the scene.

With this we should add one more rivulet to our alluvial fan, to see if we can't find a watery explanation for the directionality of flow. Is there not still something of this old story of height at work in the very dissimulation by which we lay everything out on the surface? What system of pressures, of channels, of reservoirs, of plumbing, of reclaiming and re-cycling, allows the water to always seem to pass in the same direction. In a word, we must return to the *shit*.

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<sup>252</sup> Ibid., 171.

In *Hollow Land*, Eyal Weizman, observing the architectural dimension of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict takes us beyond the usual surface reading, in which it is simply the same old story, a matter of where the line is drawn on the map: “Indeed, one of the most crucial battlegrounds of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is below the surface. About 80 per cent of the mountain aquifer is located under the West Bank. [...] The erosion of the principles of Palestinian sovereignty in its subsoil is carried out by a process so bureaucratically complex that it is almost invisible.”<sup>253</sup> The discourse of the political surface, paired and expressed through the distributive mechanisms and channels of bureaucracy, is actually driven at the level of the aquifer and disguising the battle that is waged at the material level in which the discrepancy between the length to which your pump may reach makes all of the difference. Literally a whole underground system of flow is at work—which isn’t to say that it doesn’t play out at the surface, funding its direction of flow. Let us let it play out its full course:

In the wild frontier of the West Bank, Israel’s planning chaos means Jewish neighborhoods and settlements are often constructed without permits, and populated before and regardless of sewerage systems being installed and connected. This sewage runs from the hills to the valleys, simply following the force of gravity and topography, through and across any of the boundaries that may be put in front of it. The topography of the West Bank guarantees that all raw sewage from hilltop settlements will pass down a valley next to a Palestinian town or village and that, mixing with Palestinian sewage, travelling along the same open valleys, it will eventually end up in Israeli territory. Instead of fresh water flowing in the specially conceived water pipes installed under the Wall, Israel absorbs large quantities of raw sewage from all across the West Bank. The closures and barriers of the recent Intifada thus created the very condition against which they sought to fortify. The accumulated dirt within the walled-off Palestinian areas confirmed the hygienic phobia of Zionism. Blurring the literal with the metaphorical, the piles of dirt and sewage affirmed a common national-territorial imagination that sees the presence of Palestinians as a ‘defiled’ substance within the ‘Israeli’ landscape, or as ‘matter out of place,’ to use Mary Douglas’s word, in whose book, *Purity and Danger*, dirt is defined and understood in terms of transgression of boundaries. By inducing dirt and raw

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<sup>253</sup> Eyal Weizman, *Hollow land: Israel's architecture of occupation* (New York: Verso, 2007), 19.

sewage, Israel could go on demanding the further application of its hygienic practices of separation and segregation. The legitimacy of these acts is defined as an immediate reaction to its own violation. The result is an ever-radicalizing feedback loop, by which sewage marks the collision between two meanings—a metaphorical political notion concerned with the health of the state, and the literal physical sensation of abjection.<sup>254</sup>

If this region teaches us anything it is that origins are elusive, and that things eddy around water. In this age of dispersed and globalized conflict, and mediated across a whole different layer of distribution, we still manage to think that the local is parochial. Of course one has to fight door to door, *in the shit* as it is literally said, but that is simply the nature of the beast. But what we see with this account is the much larger cycle by which this operates. As Weizman points this particular area has “distinct topographical characteristics.” It’s not just that they can’t manage their sewage, or set it to work in the collision he details. Weizman, following the diverse topology and showing how it interacts with hydrological cycles articulates a rich picture of developments forming around this unique terrain. As he puts it more dryly: “This hydrological condition asserts itself in the organization of habitation on the surface.”<sup>255</sup> While acknowledging the complexities of this particular region, we could also ask, but what region doesn’t? One never just shows up. *Civilization enters the scene*. There is no originary point, no *tabula rasa* populated only by savages, no plain—not even, or especially, not on a plain.

Instead, we actually formulate a vision of a plain on which everything can tend towards a kind of efficiency. As if bureaucracy were the formidable and horrifying doppelganger of Deweyan smoothness. The weird shared dream of progressives and conservatives alike, emerging from the same contested spring. The drive towards efficiency and standards in

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<sup>254</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>255</sup> Ibid., 19.

schooling would be the modern cave or body of education, one leaves the cave by sealing the surface itself, a flattened tomb, one never leaves, because there is nowhere to go. This is not at odds with the crypto-political imagery of *No Child Left Behind*, or *Race to the Top*, but is their continuity in a network of relentless efficiency that is also an incredible *amount of work*. The drive towards efficiency, ironically generates two anomalies that it must disown. First, it produces the most colossal waste: an apparatus of paperwork, homework, mechanisms of behavior, training, administration, curriculum, new technologies—even good will, philosophies, hopes and so on—that appears to increase exponentially, sucking up time, attention and bodies, or filtering and rebuffering them as remainders. Second, it generates an entire series of false threats (that in turn generate more of the former), a whole internal enemy that consumes its attention: problem students, apathy, resistance, violence, resentments, barriers and mechanisms of dismissal, or more banal but no less real and difficult, missed paperwork, poor communication, whole apparatuses that are put in place and routinized to address the failures of other apparatuses, and so on. It is as if there is a kind of virtual surface of schooling itself, holding all of this together, like the surface tension on water. What is consistent is not some originary meaning of schooling, but the projected surface itself masking the activity.

This excess, this generation of waste, however, should not be seen as simply the double of a properly educational content, but as an effect of the educational practice itself. Thus we have at least two systems of flow in Weizman's example, one for water and one for paper, and two systems of blockage, one political (paper as law) and one topological (water as solid, sewage.) It is not exactly that one is metaphorical and the other physical, and they collide or collude; it is that each level is both at the same time. The notion that they should be distinct



(uncolliding) can likewise take hold on both levels, as itself a dream of purification. In education it is not just that one's paperwork follows along as a *register* of an educational process, or that there is a whole bureaucratic, economic and political infrastructure of schooling, but that there is also a second stratum of paper, echoing across the boundary between administration and education, which itself has its own efficiency, its own excessive resistance to excess. *Write a paper of this length.* Education is already properly administrative. The apparent film of surface tension on water is simply an effect of the minimalism of water. Tending to the most efficient shape, anything that deforms it generates an excess of energy that resists, pushing back.

Plumbing generates paperwork, but as a minimal extension of itself. The hero of *Brazil* dreams of being suffocated by a flurry of paperwork, but it is the thinnest of layers that will do the job. We might recall the scene in which the outlaw plumber swings in, fixes the plumbing and leaves without filling out a 27B-6, counterbalanced by the plumbers from "Central Services" who, paradoxically, are both the ones traumatized by, and the enforcers of paperwork. Poised on either side of the threshold, the system operates in this tension between the two figures, itself oddly efficient, but generating an ephemeral excess, a kind of heat that threatens to turn into steam. (We should recall that it is the air-conditioning unit that is on the fritz!) Central Services turns a blind eye to the helpful, but unsanctioned, elision of paperwork, even relies on it. A machine works only by breaking down, Deleuze and Guattarri would say. But, in this case, only to the extent that it can also disavow, even prosecute, the intervention that threatens to generate or swamp the system with even *more* paperwork. This complicity thus masks the operant gesture in any number of such educational scenes that take place. That

is, in secretly acknowledging that this is just a formality, it masks the essential truth—which is not just as Žižek suggests, that the ritual meaning of sacrifice or bureaucracy is lost, that what is precisely to be sacrificed is meaning itself<sup>257</sup>—but that the division implied by the spectacle is to be acted upon. The mask is real. The institution will, indeed must, find any number of ways around itself, but will have no problem *taking seriously* the charade and violently closing the gap, as a way of maintaining the force of the differential the mask itself is.<sup>258</sup>

Therefore, while we can and should insist that each area, each city, each school, and so on, is distinct, orients along its own topologies and cycles of resources, we might also equally argue that this mode, or feedback loop, is not singular. The crisis of origin springs up everywhere. Each city will have its founding myth. Or rather each city will enact an uneasy distribution in which myth and material collide, where lines and strata are defended. Without retracing our steps once again through the flows of the *Gorgias*, we can perhaps begin to see both a superficial flow and a whole series of negotiations so complex that they are almost invisible, to borrow Weizman’s formulation. But we can also begin to get a sense that Socrates is winding tighter this “ever-radicalizing feedback loop” by which his interlocutors will come to be emblematic of the problem: hard in all the wrong ways, fluid in all of the wrong ways. While conversely, to do philosophy is to maintain the flexibility and ability to flow that Callicles argues for in the name of rhetoric, but also with the ironclad strength that was

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<sup>257</sup> Žižek, *The parallax view*, 85, 116.

<sup>258</sup> In this sense, it becomes clearer why we are fascinated with the trope of “deep cover”: the agent who will be disavowed if caught. Cinema is constantly rehearsing this role. Interestingly it is accompanied by the threat of *going native*, the agent refusing to play along, and *becoming* their cover—thus authorizing the most vigorous sanctions. Students, we know and even insist upon, are people. They are even allowed and encouraged to express this, but what is problematic is when they cease to agree to act like students, secret agents.

previously attributed to the practitioner of rhetoric as well. In return, Socrates, whose fast speed, pressing the dialogue forward, moving from place to place, continually out of place, and professing not to know, has now displaced onto rhetoric the quality of never being able to stay still, ever looking for new sources of inflow for their leaky vessels. Likewise Socrates' stubborn insistence on staying the course, plodding, resisting the rhetorical strategies and long speeches of his interlocutors, has now been displaced onto them, as they refuse to follow, intractable, and unwilling to shake their imprisoned bodies—while it was Calicles himself who argued that the very need for rhetoric was to avoid being boxed in, and shackled by the weaker.

It is this odd entrenchment in the name of openness that marks the Socratic argument in this dialogue. It is a peculiar power that is exerted over the dialogue, asserting how it must go for it to go well, displacing all that stands in the way of this onto the very interlocutors who are needed for it to come to a happy conclusion, and yet at the same time it is a radical undermining of rigid and fixed structures of thought. Attempting to legitimize dialogue itself as more worthy than long speeches, in the end we find only the thin veneer of dialogue, Socrates launching into a lengthy speech of his own, while at the same time making his intractable interlocutors shoulder the blame. It is a dialogue that sets learning against mere habit, and the ability to change and submit to the process of being made just, but in which nobody appears to learn.

False movement, we could say. An image of education and the lack of education. This is what we are to learn. But can't we see something else in this Platonic gesture, this relentless use of the situatedness of bodies and their ways of working to continue to funnel us through a very specific opening? Defending speaking over writing, what is set in line is nevertheless a

whole apparatus of orienting to the temporal rhythms of the word by stripping away the more troublesome movements and eddies of the body and its flows. This is no small matter, of interest, if at all, to Plato scholars. Rather we are witness to the double shaping up of the space by which we will recognize learning. Much has been made of the battle between the Plato and the Sophists, but in a very practical sense what was at stake was *where one would go to learn*. And what would you do with your body while you were there? This strong bond between a tomb and a passage. What map, what thread, what spatial key would unlock this relationship? This orientation to the timing and rhythms of the word, as variable as they might be, have carried us forward into our sense of the modern classroom. Itself variable, we nevertheless largely recognize it by how it arranges us to speak, read, and write. We go someplace for this.

### **Hybrid Space and the First (School) Architect: Dancing between Euclidean and Sedentary Space**

The history of educational space, of schools, attests to the power of this Platonic legacy to replicate itself. But with an odd twist. Rather than finding ways out of the cave, we find ourselves having built classroom caves, as if to keep ensuring that the roles be perpetuated. It could be argued that this story of spatially impoverished interiority, of bodies as vessels (whether closed or leaking like sieves), not only pervades the history of education, but originates it, making it recognizable across its variations. The discourse of education is the discourse translating between two and three dimensions, of two dimensions implying a third, of the book and the world, of the student and the teacher. It is no mere curiosity, therefore, that Plato had inscribed over the door to the Academy: “Let no one unversed in geometry enter my doors.” Or that other philosopher/educators followed suit with, “Let no one come to

our school, who has not first learned the elements of Euclid.” Euclidian geometry, one might say, is the door to the Academy; there is no Academy without this understanding of space.

Euclidian geometry starts with a few basic definitions such as a point, a line, a plane, a figure. While maintaining that these definitions are not objects, are only crudely represented by, say, a drawing, it is nevertheless only by drawing them that they work as definitions. In other words, a point, conceived only primitively, as that which has no parts, does not lead to a line, by arranging a series of them, because they have no distance. Rather, a line is that which is *drawn* between two points. This is an important distinction, because geometry, as we know it, finds its birth in inscriptions on a surface—be it a furrow in a wax tablet, or a footpath worn on the surface of the earth. Geometry has often missed its reliance on this fact. It is assumed that lines exist and that some of them are drawn. While the definition of a line as breadthless length precedes the postulate that a line be drawn, it is only in the drawing that a line is produced. The line (*gramme*) is drawn out (*agagein*) between points (*semeion*) showing a close affinity between writing and geometry. It is not, in fact, until chapter XIII of Euclid’s *Elements* that a line is set up, perpendicular to all the lines on a plane that intersect with it. But by this point geometry is far from its etymological root in or on the earth. If this set up line is to be considered ‘height’ it is so only in reference to a surface of inscription. Even then there is nothing, logically, preventing us from turning the whole thing over, switching axis for axis. Height=Width=Depth. The student’s notes on a wax tablet are equivalent to the writing on the wall. Euclid’s *Elements* is a book readable by anyone at anytime, and facing any direction. Euclidian geometry, strictly speaking, is devoid of a point of view. Practically speaking, each point of view is equivalent to any other, and is dictated by which possibility allows for the

clearest representation. The equivalence between points, as those concepts which have no distinguishing parts, is extrapolated to the learners/viewers themselves.

It would be perhaps too facile to claim that Plato's cave sets in motion a progression, from the horded masses, indistinguishable but in their own positions, to the book, with interchangeable readers but only a single readable viewpoint. From the single wall to many books. From Platonic shapes to Euclidian figures. Is not the book or the tablet, rather, the first condition of the cave? Is the oral philosopher not whispering in the ears of those already busy reading the speeches of the sophists? There are no bonds in the cave, no reason to stay put, without the need to read, without needing something to read and write on, a desk. It could be argued that prior to writing, with all the ambiguity that Plato imbues it with as a *pharmakon*, the roles of Plato's Republic—or of Athenian public life in general—were already clearly fixed. But what is coming about is a *new* organization, in which the bonds are not fixed relative to each other, or indeed to any social function, but to the screen bearing images of a world *beyond* the social space.

These two distinct spatializations, one Platonic the other Euclidian, come together to establish what is recognizable now as the classroom. Educational space, finds its tension between these two modes. The Platonic irony works to orient the teacher according to the bonds that allow the students to be equivalent; and Euclidian geometry perpetuates itself only by becoming the *sine qua non* of the school, transmitted from teacher to student. In either case the effect is similar and supplementary. Plato posits a dimension of height, translating it, as best one can, for the disoriented, lateral masses. Platonic spatiality thus promises an escape from indistinguishable and interchangeable positions, by positing a freed prisoner brought to an orientation to height as a privileged dimension. Euclidian geometry, in representing

vertiginous, interchangeable dimensions, must posit a point of view, strictly foreign to its subject, in order for it to be read—the beginnings of a pragmatic, efficient, pedagogy. One can look from anywhere, but let us agree for convenience and clarity that we will all look from the same point.

Modern educational spaces are typically the expression of this twin heritage. Students move in and out of interchangeable classrooms, sit in equivalent chairs with their own writing surfaces on which everyone may have the same textbook, all organized in a grid of some form. But each chair is also oriented towards the chalkboard, of which their notebooks are imitations, and the students must orient towards a teacher, free to walk the aisle, telling of the ‘real’ world outside. As Deleuze and Guattari point out, this orientation to a wall, with its signifying system, operates in every way to privilege the face over the body, and to still the student. “A child who runs around, plays, dances, and draws cannot concentrate attention on language and writing, and will never be a good subject.”<sup>259</sup>

The process of formulating a discourse of education, therefore, is not separable from the process of conceiving and creating educational spaces. There is no entrance to school without geometry, and there is no learning geometry without the interchangeable space of the school. This origin of educational discourse is intricately tied to the book and to writing, or at least to the drawing of lines. But this in turn evokes the wall as the receptor of the signifier of the cave opening opposite it, and orients everyone to face the wall. If Levinas will posit Architecture as the first of the fine arts, it is because of this tendency of walls to face us. Deleuze and Guattari relink Architecture and the face explicitly to its educational function: “Face and landscape manuals formed a pedagogy, a strict discipline.... Architecture positions

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<sup>259</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A thousand plateaus: capitalism and schizophrenia*, 180.

its ensembles—houses, towns, or cities, monuments or factories—to function like faces in the landscape they transform.”<sup>260</sup>

### **Socrates’ Ancestor and the (Dis)placement of Dance: From Labyrinth to Dance Floor**

“Socrates’ Ancestor” is an allusion, not to one of the Pre-Socratics, but to a claimed actual ancestor of Socrates, that mythical first Architect, Daedalus. In turning to this professed lineage, we would do well to be suspicious, however, of a philosopher’s recourse to bloodlines. In Plato’s *Euthyphro*, Socrates is quite mocking: “Your words, Euthyphro, are like the handiwork of my ancestor Daedalus; and if I were the propounder of them, you might say that my arguments walk away and will not remain fixed because I am a descendent of his.”<sup>261</sup> This allusion to the Automaton Daedalus is credited with crafting, is not fortuitous. Rather, Socrates continues shortly, “For I would give the wisdom of Daedalus...to be able to detain them and keep them fixed.” If Socrates evokes his architectural ancestor, it is with an eye to the evasive difficulty of architecture. Speculative thought *inherits* an architectural problem, one that Socrates, while seeming to suggest that it comes from his own ancestor, is actually keen to displace, showing it to be the proper inheritance of Euthyphro. This is the strange lineage of Philosophy: it is, and is not, the heir of its architectural ancestor.

McEwen is thus right to be cautious here. He writes,

“It would be not only foolish but pointless to interpret this link as evolutionary or causal, to claim that architecture, taken as the embodiment of ritual, gave rise to philosophy... Rather...the awareness embodied in the architectural

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<sup>260</sup> Ibid., 172.

<sup>261</sup> Plato, *Euthyphro*, 11c-e.



beginnings of archaic Greece shares a blood tie with the awareness that first becomes explicit in the speculative thought of the sixth century B.C. As equivalent manifestations of an emerging Western consciousness, the 'architectural event,' if it may be so called, and the 'theoretical event' can be understood as related moments in a single occurrence."<sup>262</sup>

Twins, then. But this is still too simple, and does not yet let us fully account for their "separation at birth," or, if we can put it thus, their sibling rivalry. McEwen's remarkable excavation of the relationship between the disciplines is so well done that we might forget to consider the reasons why it was buried to begin with. Can we merely attribute Socrates' invocation of Daedalus to playful mockery, or should we take seriously his desired bargain: to trade the wisdom of Daedalus for conceptual stability? It would be perhaps easier to write off if matters stayed at the level of automata, of clever mechanisms, leaving Architecture proper out of philosophical range. But even if Socrates does not mention it here, it is Daedalus' other, Architectural, claims to fame that will set the stage most powerfully for Socrates' bargain to set Philosophy as a discipline on proper foundations.

Daedalus, of course, is credited with building, under the city of Knossos, the Labyrinth, the image of which we have been availing ourselves. If this is the mythic beginning of Architecture, we should note yet again that the official beginning is hardly the beginning. The mythic structure of the narrative surrounding Daedalus, the Labyrinth, and its monstrous inhabitant, follows a well-worn path of myths of downgoing into the underworld. What differentiates this story, making it properly a story of the birth of Architecture, is that the underworld is *crafted*, as an artifice of humans, and directly linked to the political drama of the city. This, we might say, would serve as the character note, in the Greek mind for the new discipline: Architecture is born not with the impressive structure of the city of Knossos itself,

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<sup>262</sup>McEwen, *Socrates' ancestor: an essay on architectural beginnings*, 4.

but as a built attempt to contain the results of the misguided strivings of the cities inhabitants. An inverted, pre-collapsed Tower of Babble, the Labyrinth is both an Architectural marvel, and a sign of it's own hubris: the unfortunate container for the monstrosity that occurs when we build something unnatural. Architecture begets architecture.

It is only when we see the full mythic narrative that the complicity is clear. Daedalus, in fact, finds himself under the roof of King Minos because he has had to flee Athens, under the pall of having murdered his nephew out of jealousy for inventing the compass. While in Knossos, he builds a mechanical cow to aid Queen Pasiphae in coupling with a bull, and it is out of this monstrous union that the Minotaur is born. This poor choice to build the bull begets more building: Minos has Daedalus construct the Labyrinth to conceal the hideous results. The myth that follows is classic in its linking of downgoing into the underworld and sacrifice. Theseus, one of the children of Athens sent to feed the Minotaur, as was the ritual, with the help of Ariadne and her thread, descends into the Architectural underworld to slay the misbegotten offspring of Architectural meddling.

Here we could mark this reversal of the journey, the approach to the city with which we began feeling our way. A mad sin displaces one from home, and one sets out across the earth to find another city. The city doesn't just divide itself into two cities, upper and lower. It divides in relation to another city, or another city beneath a city. In studies of early Mesopotamian mythology there is a perplexing spatial anomaly. Sometimes the journey into the underworld is described as out, across the earth, and sometimes it is described as a descent, sometimes both. Penglase writes:

The mythical journey which the goddess [Inanna] carries out to acquire power takes the form of a descent to the netherworld, to Ereshkigal's realm beneath the surface of the earth, and the subsequent return to the upperworld. In the

text, however, she actually travels horizontally, that is, across the earth, on her journey to the netherworld entrance. The text states that she abandoned her various temples..<sup>263</sup>

First, we should recognize this interesting string of abandoned temples, reminding us of Borges' circular ruins. The journey is marked along the course of the Euphrates: "Uruk, Badtibira, Zabalam, Adab, Nippur, Kish, and Akkad." Is this just an excessive itinerary, or is there something of the essential in this litany of abandoned sites, leading to the mountains, where she will finally descend at Kutû? "Assuming that Kutû does not actually mean the netherworld here, the city would therefore function in a symbolic way as the netherworld."<sup>264</sup> But this is to miss the point, that the two are always combined. What, for example, would be an "actual netherworld," or even an "actual meaning of the netherworld"? One simply below the ground, straight down?

If we keep in mind the dance between the sun and the earth, rather than our modern orthogonality between the horizontal and vertical, we would remember that for the sun to go down it sets over the horizon, descending into a cave in the mountains. Down and out. We could even say that the mountains, were not only, for the Greeks, the natural habitat of caves, but themselves represented a kind of labyrinth. They were the uncertain place at the limits of the city, past the plains, where things got messy, where the passage might become difficult, perhaps even this transitional region in the handing off of the tiller of the cosmos, that heaves.

An *oros* is not, then to be defined simply in terms of physical height. Instead we should look to what, in our sources, is contrasted with an *oros*. An *oros* is not the plain (where you grow corn and fight in phalanx), nor is it the city or the village

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<sup>263</sup> Penglase, *Greek myths and Mesopotamia: parallels and influence in the Homeric hymns and Hesiod*, 24.

<sup>264</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

(where you live; but neither is it the acropolis, that fortified height [...] *within* the city.<sup>265</sup>

It was used for pasturage; it was a source of raw materials; most hunting and trapping was done there; it was used for passage; but above all it was represented a particular ideological range for fighting—striking range. Dangerous hands.

The *oros* was a territory which could be explored by light-armed troops, but which was wholly unsuited to the hoplite phalanx. Given the strong ideological component in the divide between hoplite and non-hoplite, and given the pervasive rules of appropriateness underpinning Greek warfare, it is surely comprehensible that the mountain warfare is as relatively infrequent as it is....” But also that “the *oros*, a space which is simultaneously not the city and not the plain, should in some parts of Greece form the backdrop to the military education of the adolescent male [...] The *oros* could be an initiatory space (one may compare the wolf-men of Lykaion).<sup>266</sup>

A zone of problematic struggle is also an initiatory space. Buxton enumerates its qualities: it is a wild space (“One who commits matricide belongs outside.”); mountains are *before*, from a time of floods, for example; a mountain is a place for *reversals*, metamorphosis and recombination of things normally distinct. And we could so it is the place where the mythic and ritualized version of things itself coexists. The ritual we could say is the bloody, sacrificial version without the blood:

In the mountain-dance for Dionysus the *oros* once more stages a reversal of normal values, as the women wander free, thanks to a temporary legitimation of ‘madness’. But this is ritual not myth: the women commit no crime, tear no nephew, behead no poet; and return afterwards to their looms. Through ritual the wildness of the mountain (and of women) is both acknowledged and controlled.<sup>267</sup>

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<sup>265</sup> R. G. A. Buxton, *Imaginary Greece: the contexts of mythology* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 81-2.

<sup>266</sup> *Ibid.*, 84.

<sup>267</sup> *Ibid.*, 95.

We see, then this odd function in which the mountain is the underworld, where the descent is ritualized, and nothing much happens.

To approach a far city is “to descend” into its underworld, unless of course, you are an architect, the first architect, in which case you construct it first. And then you emerge. The ritual of sacrifice for the good of one’s city, or for a crime committed there, is to repeat this journey, marking both a regular cycle and a life. To leave the cave is to find your way home. Here is where the disorienting twists and turns of the labyrinth start to take on a regulated order, getting smoothed over.

As McEwen points out the *kosmos* referred not just to this ordering we examined in first approaching the city, but also to a (feminine) adornment, a kind of second skin, surface, or body, allowing it to appear.

“If women, in ancient Greece, were essentially invisible, cosmetic *kosmos* made them visible. In archaic statuary, ideal youths (*kouroi*) stride forward, one foot resolutely planted before the other. They are always naked. Ideal maidens (*korai*) stand stock still, feet together, beautifully dressed. [...] [In Homeric hymn to Artemis] especially, but also in other passages where female divinities adorn themselves, or as Homeric language actually describes it, wrap themselves in *kosmos*, in order to go dancing, the suggestion is that the ordering of the dance is a reflection of their adornment, or ordered second skin, and vice versa.”<sup>268</sup>

This coming to order or revealing, is thus intimately related to not only to the covering of the feminine earth, but also to cloth and weaving, to the body, and somehow to this strange relationship between still feet and dance. Indeed, afterward, constructing the Labyrinth Daedalus crafts a dance floor, a *choros*, a place where, in McEwen’s insightful analysis, the passage up and out of the intractable labyrinth can be enacted and given order. The labyrinth,

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<sup>268</sup> McEwen, *Socrates' ancestor: an essay on architectural beginnings*, 44.

recollecting us to our earlier following of Anaximander and the *kosmoi*, was *apeiros*: boundless, without escape, immeasurable. A deadly trap.

“Yet the *image* of the Labyrinth, as it appears on Cretan coins as well as in all later representations from Roman mosaics to the floors of Gothic cathedrals and Renaissance gardens, is invariably not confused at all. Whether circular or square, it invariably has a very clear and regular configuration. The image of the Labyrinth, its *eidos*—the thing seen and therefore known for certain—is the *choros*.<sup>269</sup>

The Labyrinth’s *image*, its view from outside, is the dance floor as if, from two different perspectives, they are the same thing. This is not the mechanical movement of an architectural automaton, this is the shifting fluidity of the material itself. The *apeiros* takes up order. But not only is the *choros* the labyrinth and the dance floor, but also the dance itself, the group that dances, “as in the chorus of a Greek tragedy,” or indeed any group or grouping. The dance becomes the coming together of people in the same boat, or fleet, or city. As if the sea becomes a ship; a Minotaur slain, becomes a gridded city.

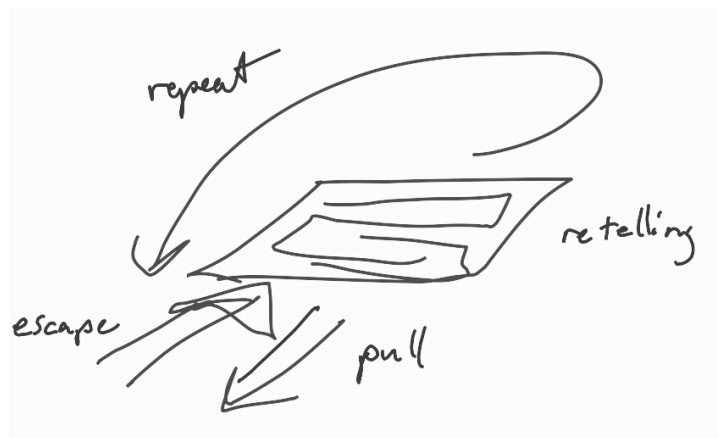


Figure 7: the chorus as grid and cycle...

<sup>269</sup> Ibid., 60.

Dance, of course, is squeezed out of schools. Squeezed out and then reinserted (if only as an image.)<sup>270</sup> This is not paradoxical but strictly necessary. Within the already marginalized arts, dance itself often tends to represent the very margins within the margins. School is the place where dance is the dangerous other. This is the ambivalence of the *choros*. It cleaves to death, and its *image* is of emergent life. For example:

The Dance of Death or 'Le Danse Macabre' or 'Totentanz' or 'la Danza de la Muerte' was an artistic response across Europe to the devastation brought about by the plague or black death. Although the origins are obscure, the idea of death visiting households without regard for social or economic status arose as a cultural phenomenon by way of dramatic plays. (Dante and Petrarch are mentioned as possible examples) The inevitability of death was a reminder to be prepared by living a pious life: 'Memento Mori' — 'Remember You Will Die'.<sup>271</sup>

Within this educational context, dance, if it comes, and must be engaged with, also contains a pious injunction. *Don't get carried away, because anyone might get carried away.* While dance might slip into a school as limit, and is even a cliché in such films as *Take the Lead*, the typical dance of schools is orchestrated by the bell, coordinating the timely transitions down hallways, marking the school day and calendar until the day one will finally emerge into the light. The dance might be excessive, coming to sweep all away, but it can also serve a narrowly educational function, keeping us in our place, codifying our proper relationships. This is its odd relationship to death. It is not with death that the dance ends, but rather this is when it takes over, going on too long, calling for a recalibration, sacrifice.

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<sup>270</sup> Reinserted in ordered form, or rather as the display of this coming to order. Hence the fascination with the image of ballroom dance in school, which serves to *focus* tension while appearing to give it outlet. We might also reflect on the role of the two most sanctioned and prevalent form of dance in the margins of school: cheerleading, and formal dances like the prom.

<sup>271</sup> "Heidelberger Totentanz," in *BibliOdyssey* (2006).

The *choros* flows both ways. The dance of death represents an exuberant excess of life. The educational dance/labyrinth will take on any number of codified, rigid structures in a kind of inverted labyrinth—too measured, losing us because there is no place to hide—but it may also fold back on itself and turn into any number of other things. Isn't this Plato's frustration: so many (false) contenders? But we should remember that the *choros* is not *like* a labyrinth; it is one, and the floor, and us, and the dance. The architecture itself dances us. We get lost in it.

Walter Benjamin suggests that the labyrinth is what emerges from a way of moving, of holding back, "The labyrinth is the habitat of the dawdler. The path followed by someone reluctant to reach his goals easily becomes labyrinthine." Adam Phillips glosses thus:

Getting lost is what you do—is what the dawdler does—when he is in no way lost; when he knows exactly where he is going, and how to get there. Getting lost, the creation of the labyrinth is the work done when there is an object of desire. You get lost because you are not lost. So we can say: we are lost when there is no object of desire; and we make ourselves lost when there is an object of desire. We get lost. It is something we get.<sup>272</sup>

A difference then between being lost, at a loss, and getting lost. But if we are not too quick to distinguish between the objects of our desire and the labyrinth itself—the more convoluted way, if we can put it thus, the labyrinth is the dance of a Minotaur that is us—then perhaps we can understand Phillips next stage differently, less sequentially. He writes, in a Lacanian thread, "[O]nce there is an object of desire there is a fantasy of catastrophe. Lacan says that for the obsessional the catastrophe is an excess of pleasure, for the hysteric an excess of frustration; in other words, once there is an object of desire there is an omniscient fantasy about the consequences of pursuing the object of desire."<sup>273</sup>

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<sup>272</sup> Adam Phillips, *On balance* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2010), 169.

<sup>273</sup> *Ibid.*, 172. Cf. Žižek's diabolical approach, in the documentary, *Žižek!*, in which he indicates his *spontaneous* affinity with quantum physics, which is to say that there is literally nothing. *What is* is a



Phillips will suggest that perhaps one of the best defenses against simply being lost, against having the catastrophe simply beset us is to *get* lost, “partly because it makes us feel that we have, as it were, taken the problem into our own hands, turned, as psychoanalysts say, passive into active.” Back to hands then. Perhaps, more than any analytic distinction between inside and outside, passive and active—haven’t we discovered that it is always in the passage between these that things get scary and/or interesting?—we should remember to think of these hands as something more than metaphors.

The problem of hands, though, is this minimal arc, this way in which we keep them busy. Left to right, or constrained to a keyboard or pointing device. It’s not that there isn’t much to be said for this *subtlety*; it’s the way in which it resets that we might be haunted by. The more regulated they become, the more our hands become detached from spine, our balance, our twisting. They float up in view, suspended. Mere hands. We should think of all the mischief that detached hands get up to. This is the difficulty that no amount of reversals gets us closer to. The reversals *disguise* and generate the sense of the hands as vestigial. Cryptic sign makers.<sup>274</sup> So when we take matters into our own hands are we saying something about the need for our hands to be taken up with matter, grounded in something that asks hands to participate in a larger system of turnings, or are we indicating a desire to bring everything into

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result of an imbalance, a catastrophe. Things exist as a result of a horrible mistake. The only way to counter-act this is to assume the mistake, take it up, and go to the end, to love the mistake. “In this quite formal sense, love is evil.” Although in some sense inverting Phillip’s Lacanian order, we find again this gesture of taking to hand—a kind of perhaps illusive activeness, but in which this is expressed as a minimalist hyperbolic gesture. One goes to the end by following along, adding merely love.

<sup>274</sup> It is odd, today, that as handwriting is less and less the medium of signing, the signature remains as the link between our individual identity and our idiosyncratic waverings. We can deposit a check by taking a picture of it with our phone, but still we must sign it, our own consistent cryptograph.

this minimal arc?<sup>275</sup> Have we found our effective range, the way in which small movements around a proximal axis immersed in a plenum can make a large difference, finding our agency not in how we are dragged through a scene but in the accrued effect of many small movements, gestures, words, glances; or have we simply tossed our hands up, which might amount to the same thing as setting them to the oars? In either case, we might be suspicious of the Platonic insistence that the direction of orientation is the critical distinction. It is precisely the way in which we can hardly register the difference, that plagues him.

For example, if we head the other direction from Phillip's Lacanian direction, from object of desire to labyrinthine delay to dreams of catastrophe, we still discover the same difficulty. Žižek's diabolical approach, for example, in the documentary *Žižek!*, follows from his *spontaneous* affinity with quantum physics, which is to say that there is literally nothing. *What is* is a result of an imbalance, a catastrophe. Things exist as a result of a horrible mistake. The only way to counter-act this is to assume the mistake, take it up, and go to the end, to love the mistake. "In this quite formal sense, love is evil." Although in some sense inverting Phillip's Lacanian order, we find again this gesture of taking to hand—a kind of perhaps illusive activeness, but in which this is expressed as a minimalist hyperbolic gesture. One goes to the end by following along, adding merely love.

Part of the dilemma is that we have a hard time working with our hands, don't know them so well. "Knowing something like the back of your hand" is something of a cruel joke. We *draw on them* in some elusive way, as if they were sufficient to ground out a metaphor for

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<sup>275</sup> What, for that matter, might we want to distinguish between the polished movements or writing or navigating, this way of capturing anything, and the potentially rending hands—if *they are able* to get their hands on us—of the cave? For all of their chaotic grasping, is not the figure of these reaching hands attached to fixed or slow bodies, organized around a *desire* to close the arc, to draw something in—to a mouth or a hole in the earth, to keep it from staying at large?

something else, but this something else is all too often a space generated by constraining our use of ourselves to a narrow range, that is a kind of practiced ignorance of other kinds of handiwork. So how *do* we recognize this taking to hand, especially when the thing being taken up is a kind of dawdling or delay? Do we hang back, or lean forward? Or if we are to make our path labyrinthine, do we veer off from a course to take another uncertain direction?

Perhaps all we can say is that this is the uncertain space of education, this contested, (in)different terrain, in which we continue to find and lose ourselves. Perhaps one way of taking matters into our own hands is to trace how indebted our ways of thinking, constructing and navigating this space, are to our strange ancestors. And so it is to Deedless that we will finally return. From flight for murdering one's kin, to engendering mechanical cow, to hellish maze, to the public platform for ordered and ritual reenactment: taken together we can perhaps now see the full sweep of this myth of Architecture's first practitioner, and Socrates' estranged ancestor. On the one hand, one can read this as an unfortunate set of events and escalations resulting from Architectural meddling in affairs best left to nature. And on the other hand, we can see it as the Architectural intervention into the trouble world of political drama that eventually allows for a coherent closure in which order is made out of chaos. Socrates is dismissive, of course, of Architecture's ability to lead us astray, its magical ability to animate what should stay put so that it might just wander off, as well as the criticism we saw earlier linking the body and tomb. This is his swipe at the built world: it fixes things in place, and gets things backwards. We are imprisoned and entombed in life, for our misdeeds, and only in death are we set free. Body and tomb: our convoluted prison, keeping us imprisoned by allowing us to wander endlessly. Our cities are no better.

So much for the relationship between siblings. Yet, this apparent rebuff winds up being one that is central to the story of Philosophy's own birth. Which is to say, it is not so easy a thing to leave behind. Philosophy is not so much born, finally on its way, as much as it discovers in itself a discipline of the journey itself. We can begin to recognize a parallel to the story of Daedalus: what is being told by Socrates is the story of emergence itself. Philosophy is not the practice of wisdom, but rather a striving tendency towards wisdom. In telling this story, we do not so much leave the labyrinth/tomb behind, as articulate the space of the journey itself. Just as we can't simply imagine the architectural work of Daedalus to be the simple creation of structures, but as a process of crafting the dramatic form through which the story moves, Socrates shows the work of philosophy to consist of articulating a way of understanding the space through which it will imagine itself as coming to be.

## *Endings: Occupation and the Dream of Escape*

-What did we learn, Palmer?  
 -I don't know, sir.  
 -I don't fucking know either. I guess we learned not to do it again.  
 -Yes sir.  
 -Well, I'm fucked if we know what we did.  
 -Yes sir, it's, uhm, hard to say.  
 -Jesus fucking Christ.

—The Coen Brothers, last lines from *Burn After Reading*

Solution: to be both inside and outside at the same time. Is this possible?

—Jean-Paul Sartre, *Notebooks*<sup>277</sup>

### **The Hekademia and Occupation**

I write this, tucked away in a room in a tower of academe late at night on the Upper West Side of Manhattan. South of me, “Wall Street” has been occupied for just over a month. It is not at all clear what this means. We are witness to a language being born (which is to say, always, re-born), a strategy of acting differently, with all its ambiguities and birthing pains. As if to highlight the challenge, the occupiers have set up camp not on Wall Street, but in Zucotti Park, within the shadow of the shadow of the Twin Towers. The astute headline by McKenzie Wark

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<sup>277</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, *Notebooks for an ethics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 4.

forefronts the dilemma: “How do you Occupy an Abstraction?”<sup>278</sup> All the more complicated when the site of the abstraction has multiple resonances. Memorial and occupation. How do you inhabit the shadow of a building that is not there? And what are we doing when we occupy this?

Does the re-claiming of a territory, in its very opposition, also veil a kind of mourning? Amongst the multiplicity of tensions at play within the “movement,” one of the most interesting is that between a desire for alternative strategies, and a kind of sad longing for the previous strategy to have worked: we did what we were told, and it turns out it was not what it seemed. Were we surprised to find ourselves nostalgic for capitalism? Under the guise of a kind of quasi-intentional lack of a plan, what would perhaps most surprise us, would be a kind of inner coherence: assembly born out of our mourning the death of the thing we imagine opposing. Lacking a plan, the movement surprised itself by coming. By occupying.

The nascent name for the movement, “Occupy Wall Street” was not without forethought. Just as, “occupation” has a long history. But perhaps what surprised so many is the way in which it caught on, spread, struck a nerve that resonated with so many, from so many places, and with often so little in common. The early coverage of the movement seemed to center around two tropes: how few people were there (either actually or as presented by the media), and how unwilling the media was to cover the event in the first place. An occupation that seemed ready to run out of steam, either from not enough people or not enough interest. This was what, paradoxically, so many people showed an interested in. The usual story.

What was surprising, perhaps to everyone, was that they were still there. Something remained, until that seemed inevitably to become the story. A story of long odds, regardless of

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<sup>278</sup> McKenzie Wark, "How to occupy and abstraction?," (Verso Books, 2011).

who you were betting on. What seemed to be at stake was the very likelihood of occupation itself, not even of a particular park—as we would see, it didn't stay put, but found expression in any number of other sites—or even as a strategy, but as an action imbued with resonance. It is as if people were surprised to find that occupying mattered. If occupying has a long history, it is as if we forgot to imagine that it was still possible, that we might, in some challenging way, actually care about occupying. Perhaps we thought we had left such quaint things behind, and certainly around abstractions such as Wall Street. What started out seeming naïve or a kind of political sloganeering, found dry tinder. The journey to the symbolic heart of New York City to stand vigil managed to catch and flame. Could any number of combinations of words and actions served to coordinate such an endeavor? Or is there something about “occupying” that is neither accidental nor a sure bet? It is difficult not to be left with the impression both that something quite remarkable is happening around the Occupy Wall Street Movement, and also that it is unclear exactly what that is.

Yet again we find ourselves on the road, occupying a street. Occupied by the notion of occupying a street. Would it not be better to shut the door for a moment, and conclude? And yet, I find myself here, locked away, writing of occupation. What retroactive reason could be offered, to justify this claim on my attention? Or for that matter what is the claim? We would have to glean it from the barest of clues. Didn't it emerge just now from some odd affinity between places, between this backroom in a place of higher education and a makeshift camp in the heart of an abstraction?

Could it be that one of the reasons the trope of “occupation” has found such a strong resonance is because we have been raised on the images of education. Not this particular image, who remembers such things but scholars? One has to go looking in the nooks and

crannies. It is not the images *within* education, but the images of some hypothetical education, images that allow us to know where we fit and how we are to navigate the “real world.” Amongst other things, we “Race to the Top,” and strive to leave “No Child Left Behind,” and even if we are not meant to take them at face value we nevertheless organize around them even as we might challenge their *depth*. And so it should be no surprise that when these tropes fall flat, we are left to wonder what it means to occupy something that doesn’t exist, or to occupy the pathways themselves. Enacting stories of being on the move, we find ourselves in the midst of things. The Movement as movement, in the pedestrian sense. Abandoning capitalizations of all sorts, it aims instead at a practice of horizontality.<sup>279</sup> What is it that we are occupying ourselves with while we are there? And if this is bound up with the story of education, what is it that we are learning?

It is no small thing, this question of place, this mythic alliance between a site and learning. “Academia,” we say, evoking a tradition, a legacy of sacredness, but also in the same breath, a hint of betrayal, of a strange world unto itself, a world of exceptions. Should we be surprised if the story of Academus is a story of a person inextricably and complicatedly in relationship to a place. This connection, over time, comes to stand for an odd bargain sparing things from occupation. Hekadēmos: betrayer of Helen’s hiding place at Aphidnea to her rescuing brothers. As Plutarch would have it, Helen of Troy has been abducted, and her brothers are on the move, looking for where she might be concealed:

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<sup>279</sup> The human microphone, each person repeating a speaker’s words to those behind them is born out of an artificially induced need, but it brings about something that is otherwise unheard of in New York City, a transmission of words, laterally, from body to body rather than a comment. Likewise, we see a kind of repetition of horizontality itself, a kind of training in horizontal pedagogy, that happens both on a spontaneous and intentional level. An idea is not made to be presented or released but must demonstrate its capacity to propagate through the system.



At first, then, they did no harm, but simply demanded back their sister. When, however, the people of the city replied that they neither had the girl nor knew where she had been left, they resorted to war. But Academus, who had learned in some way or other of her concealment at Aphidnae, told them where she was hidden. For this reason he was honored during his life by the Tyndaridae, and often afterwards when the Lacedaemonians invaded Attica and laid waste all the country round about, they spared the Academy, for the sake of Academus.<sup>280</sup>

Plato's Academy, at the Hekademeia, is thus doubly situated. From 'Εκάδημος to 'Ακάδημος, by classical times the resonance will be complete, the site drawing from two narratives, one of historic heroes and the other of mythic gods. The Hekademeia being a shelter for the sacred cult of Athena as well. The Academy: a sacred and protected place, earned by uncovering another place of concealment. The guarded place in which hiding places elsewhere are revealed. What is the pact that the Academy must make to have its space spared, what secrets must it reveal of another place? And since we find ourselves there, what does it mean to occupy a space that is protected from occupation?

As the imagery of occupation shows its wild unwillingness to stay still, searching perhaps as it is for Helen, it finds itself everywhere or anywhere. But before we too quickly set out to Occupy Education, we should be careful to reflect on it as a question. What are we doing when we occupy the groves of the Academy? We should also be careful, however, to not treat it as a question for mere reflection, as only academics, having bought a bit of reprieve, can do. A subject for suitable inquiry. Instead we have to realize the place that is this question is busy being occupied. We have been busy occupying ourselves in it. We are Lacedaemonians and Greeks alike. And the challenge we face is to see whether we can not just inhabit the difficult

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<sup>280</sup> Plutarch, *Theseus*, 32.

place we are in, but to do so as an active question, a question of activity. With all of the ambiguity that we have seen such an activity entails.

Above all, we discover the difficulty of occupation, the way it eludes itself, is transitive, across spaces. This is the movement's potential revolutionary drive, they have ceased making demands, and have no interest in the space itself. It is interested rather, in seeing how spaces can move. But this is also plagued by a kind of standoff. A war. How many times, Plutarch seems to suggest, this invasion will repeat itself. Each time, everything will be laid waste, something spared. Often afterwards. Again we see this spinning of the shell, this incommunicable and yet singular relationship, spinning around. The difference needs to be made evident, the distance traveled, the coin spun, in order for something to come about, but isn't this the perpetual dream. Bataille sees the way in which space is put to work as a way of not noticing, a kind of domesticity, the sparing of a space, but dreams of the invasion.

Space would of course be far better off *doing its duty* and fabricating the philosophical idea in professor's apartments! Obviously it will never enter anybody's head to lock the professors up in prison *to teach them what space is* (the day, for example, the walls collapse before the bars of their dungeons.<sup>281</sup>

But this too is recuperated. Professors and students alike rehearse these dreams of collapse and escape. We have lost our sister, and invade. We stay at home and wait to share our news. Let us run through it, one more time. (*And often afterwards...*) To begin, do we not always dream of finding our way inside, first by doing no harm, then perhaps by war?

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<sup>281</sup> Bataille et al., *Encyclopaedia Acephalica: comprising the Critical dictionary & related texts*, \*\*\*.

## Black Holes of Ideology, or “A Room with a View (in Orbit)”

We live, now, in the age of black holes, where interiority is conceivable only *in theory*, from the apparent effects of an inexorable pull. Mysterious effects from nowhere. The haunting dream of our age of pure extension is the impossible interior, the mystery on the other side of a cataclysmic event horizon, the fuzzy line of impossible return. Is it there that we would, finally, find ourselves? More properly home than home, it is in the depths of ever-expanding space that we project interiority. By an odd inversion, interiority is not to be found in the privacy of one's home, cubical, or thoughts, (which, instead of being experienced as withdrawal, plug us into the networked grid of our extended world). Instead interiority is what resides out beyond the frontier.

Having finally broken free to the deterritorialized expanse of space, the astronaut's gaze turned earthward, striving to make out what can still be gleaned of the world left behind, as if, having finally achieved the escape only dreamt of, we turned immediately nostalgic. (The Greeks, as we've indicated, warned of looking back as one ascended out of the underworld, but also knew that things only got interesting once the test was failed.)

Or is it that we could only finally make sense of our world by stepping outside of it? That we leave *in order* to look back? The images of earth from space alternate between a collective awe at the lack of boundaries that is our shared human scope, and the secret scrutiny of spy photos, peaking from an impossible height in through bedroom windows, before eventually converging today in the democratic premise of Google Earth: comprehensive scrutiny.

Having only then taken in the shrinking earthly sphere, our gaze telescoped outward, straining to the limits of perception, to search the blackness of the depths of space for its

secret interiors. No wonder we imagine it inhabited by strange creatures who might slip through portals and wormholes: the monstrous, inhuman. Our unconscious. The cramped confines of the illuminated space capsule, rather than being the effective inside, was instead one more launching pad for our searching gaze, flitting between deep space and inscrutable earth, always left out, cosmic voyeurs, straining at the keyhole.

Is this not the perpetual crisis and panic of education? To finally see inside. To finally get inside in order to emerge into a world? If so, it would not be enough to articulate a theory of educational space. Nor of a more fluid disciplinary terrain. Nor a modern architectonics of learning: to finally break free of the lagging material weight of factory classrooms, for a long overdue, appropriately human and dynamic educational environment. Integrated interiors. Smart classrooms. What would remain to think is this displacement itself, this constant deferral, the plight of astronauts searching for home in the furthest corners of the universe. If according to Buckaroo Bonzai, "wherever you go, there you are" we might equally say: "wherever you go, you just missed yourself." As Novalis puts it, "Philosophy is properly home-sickness; the wish to be everywhere at home." Witness Novalis' precision: it is not that we wish to go back home, but that we wish to be at home in the world out there. And above all *a wish*: home as a perpetually deferred future. Which is simply another way of saying that the desire is as old as the hills. Because, appearances aside, the problem of black holes is not a strictly modern dilemma. If education today lives in the futuristic dream of escaping the pull of history, in doing so it repeats these older tales we have been looking at.

By now we should recognize that interiority is a kind of recurring motif, an enduring metaphor for learning. If only, that is, metaphor itself wasn't an effect of the workings of interiority. Metaphor: that which is carried over (meta-phoro) from one place to another; a

way of speaking *in here* of what is elsewhere. Or is it the other way around, a way of speaking elsewhere of what we are assured resides within the precise confines of a box? In any case, it would be impossible to speak simply of a metaphor of education. Which is not to say that this is not the standard ploy. To speak of education *as if* it takes place. Place as a metaphor for what resides beyond place. School as the place of Learning. This is the paradoxical gesture of education, to make space itself a metaphor. While there is a necessary, logical specificity to what we might call the "content" of this metaphor—its spatial workings—the operative gesture in telling it is to establish the displacement of metaphor. "We are not where we are." School is the place in which we participate in the collective belief that we are behaving metaphorically. The classroom is like a world. Which is to say, only an idiot would believe that it was actually a world. This is the first and primary lesson of Education: Don't be a numbskull. Isn't the definition of being "thick-headed" to live on the inside without even realize it? The wise "think outside the box."

We have seen already how Plato's cave allegory picks up, and relays, much earlier threads. From the story of the birth of Athena from Zeus' head, and from foreheads to mountain peaks and the entrance to the underworld, with its multiple mythic descents and emergences tracing all the way back to early Mesopotamia. Socrates' great effect was to take up the ritual cleaving of the earth itself, cracking open the earthly prison of ignorance to the light of day. We *see* inside. The story itself turns out to be a story of the nigh impossibility of actually emerging, unless somehow we were dragged. But which is it? Do we cleave the earth, seeing the whole story laid out in its moldy glory, or are we popped out of a hole in the ground? And what exactly is it that we are learning? Or not learning? Because if the allegory of the cave is that of education, what has been revealed is that the cave more properly the place

in which education doesn't occur. A story, "of education and the want of education." The take-home message is that even if it were possible it wouldn't be possible. Nothing escapes. And not without paying the price.

Surely a strange story, but what is stranger still is how this fallen space becomes a model for learning. If—the logic seems to go—you don't have a dreadful, moldy interior to leave behind, the only way to enact the impossible journey of educational egress is to build one. Or rather, at least two: the labyrinth/dance-floor on which will be enacted the ascent, the chaos is regulated and repeated. Or many: just as the singularity of the city of origin finds itself not only doubled itself, but situated within a world with other cities and their own ports and labyrinths, this singular tale of “education” becomes distributed, and repeated until we arrive at the quintessential modern classroom, found everywhere: an interior space in which the "students" face a wall and are presented with replicas and representations of a "real world" that lies elsewhere.



Figure 8: The Tower of Knowledge as a hierarchical *choros*.

If the Scholastics of the Middle Ages didn't bother to build these spaces below ground, opting instead for towers of knowledge, it is only because, in Platonic spirit, the world itself was already the hellish lower city. The earthly city of man stood in stark contrast to the projected city of god, a city beneath a city. And in the process the educational cave became codified as architecture, both literally and figuratively. The path through these interior spaces was laid out and populated with modes of knowledge leading eventually to salvation in the heavenly city of god. All one had to do was lock oneself inside, leaving behind the sinful city of men.

That was the path *in theory*, in any case. But it is a strange journey. Take Dante's mapping of the journey through hell, for example. We see, again a strange doubling. On the one hand, everyone there is in their proper place, and while progress is in theory possible, it is only our guided tour—that we the reader also seem able to tag along for—that seems free somehow to move along. Edification through slumming. An education about the trials and tribulations of education. By dreaming of slipping into the interior as an outsider one might

see the codified path. Like the cave allegory, this fantasmatic following of the path while not being on the path seems to generate another fantasy as well, the idea that, cleaving the earth, one could represent the architecture of fallen space in elevation, as it were. Indeed, an entire cottage industry formed around just such an enterprise. As if to reflect this double perspective, the interior was not only the place in which the proper steps were laid out for anyone to follow. The interior was also increasingly the place where knowledge could be subject to scrutiny and test. The scholar's study was the proper place to study both the heavens and the earth. (Vermeer's *Astronomer*, e.g.)

In that sense, Descartes—famous for his critique of scholasticism's moldy and rickety accumulation of errors, as well as for schematizing space as pure extension, stretching to infinity—was also the last of the great Scholastics—an indoor thinker *par excellence*. Tucking himself away from the world, in his stove heated room, he stripped his mind bare to see what might show itself to him still, as un-rejectable. What makes it back across the threshold? The interior becomes the place for the careful bracketing out of the exterior, only to poke the most rigorously tiny of holes, to see what might make itself back in. It is not that education withdraws and is no longer an urban problem, but that the mind becomes essentially urban, a synecdochal blank slate for the building of a rational city of thought. Educational interiority turns back on itself, placing the cave on the outside, and creating an interior space for enacting the destruction and reconstruction of the city. This reversal does not replace the Platonic cave, but supplements it. One goes up by going within. The city must pass through the tiniest of openings.

We should recollect the cave. But even more so, we should invoke the camera obscura. That magical allegorical device that allowed for the translation between inside and outside,



passing through a pinhole. This was the new technology of the stage-whisper, the staging of an illusion of transfer. Witness the drama that erupted at the modern day suggestion that Vermeer availed himself of the camera obscura to reflect such naturalism. The poised moment captured, it turns out, by a technological cheat. Is not the outrage at pulling aside the veil, showing the apparatus from the side? But at the same time, this is the pleasure of it. Images of camera obscuras are always shown with a side removed, or a curtain drawn back, revealing, more often than not, a human figure in a position to see. What is revealed is the revelation itself. And in fact, large scale camera obscuras as well as other optical devices proliferated, fueling a popular fascination. Aside from the fascinating technological marvel of it, the sense that one was seeing something illusory, was also no doubt a voyeuristic desire somehow turned inside out. Rather than looking through a keyhole into an interior space, one could close oneself inside and spy on the world. But next to, or rather, above this public fascination ran an inversion of scholarly space and gestures as well. The architectural spaces that had been built as a way to move from the world to the heavens turned out to be the place where the heavens could be studied, at hand, as it were. By turning the study into a camera obscura, or eventually place a telescope in the window, the heavens were showing themselves directly, if upside down.

In any case the work is done: to see a thing clearly, it is best to create a box next to the thing, prick a hole in it, and then enclose yourself in the box. As Jonathan Crary indicates, “Beginning in the late 1500s the figure of the camera obscura begins to assume a preeminent importance in delimiting and defining the relations between observer and world.”<sup>282</sup> Notice the

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<sup>282</sup> Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the observer: on vision and modernity in the nineteenth century* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990), 38.

inversion, the camera obscura itself becomes the figure, and the observer one of the elements that its figure delimits. This interior of this dark, closed box becomes the way in which we can see ourselves situated. As Crary notes, the coming to the fore of the camera obscura signals a shift from the geometrical optics of the seventeenth and eighteenth century to a physiological optics. The body is placed back into the field as a viewer. Shall we call this a reevaluation of the perspective of Plato's prisoners? But with this new interest in the body as a perceiver, we do not, for all of that, escape the cave. Instead the body is pinned all the more firmly. In order to see the image one has to stand just so, in relation to a fixed architecture. Perspectival art, in order to be viewed properly will demand that you find a point in space to look from, just as the Dürer Grid, as a technology of translating an object seen through a gridded panel onto a paper will require the artist to hold their eye to a singular point with an aid. But likewise the body as an observer is now laid out for study, itself arrayed for view. Touch and movement were bracketed out as distinct from the sight. By the following century, optical devices

involved arrangements of bodies in space, regulations of activities, and the deployment of individual bodies, which codified and normalized the observer within rigidly defined systems of visual consumption. They were techniques for the management of attention, for imposing homogeneity, anti-nomadic procedures that fixed and isolated the observer using "partitioning and cellularity, in which the individual is reduced as a political force."<sup>283</sup>

But through all of this we see the odd tension between interiority and exteriority. The more we placed ourselves in the interior, the more we find scenes of an outside, and the more we begin to treat the interior itself as a kind of gridded pure externality subject to view. We place the body in the box of space itself. It is for this reason that we need to challenge the traditional reading of Descartes as the father of mind/body dualism, and an inner thinker. While

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<sup>283</sup> Ibid., 18.

Descartes himself may have strengthened the conditions that allowed him to be read in this way, a closer reading of Descartes shows that things are more complicated. While this would entail a lengthy argument, two things bear noting here. The first is the significant texts of Descartes exploring human anatomy, optics and the brain. Treated separately by Descartes, and largely neglected by philosophers, they demonstrate a serious attempt to explore the exchange between interior and exterior.<sup>284</sup> And while there are a number of attempts to recover and analyze these works within a historic context, they tend to be limited to a sort of medical history that is curious but divorced from a larger philosophical context.<sup>285</sup> As a corollary on the philosophical side, there is a tendency to reduce the notion of interiority to an almost philosophical stance, rather than thinking through the functional relationship between inside and outside, and in particular the theatrical spatial structures of Descartes' imagery. Susan Bordo's *The Flight to Objectivity: Essays on Cartesianism and Culture* is a prime example, arguing that Descartes' strategy was one of an inner flight to an objective state.<sup>286</sup> While there is much to be lauded in her approach, what is elided is the ways in which Descartes' language continues to reflect an optical space in which things come into view, creating a relationship between these objects and some sort of focal point. As a result, it becomes easier to imagine that Descartes was a mere recluse, locking himself away from the world, and in particular from the city. Indeed his own personal history often seems to support this reading. But as Kevin Dunn notes in "A Great City is a Great Solitude: Descartes' Urban Pastoral," Descartes'

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<sup>284</sup> See René Descartes, *The world and other writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

<sup>285</sup> See for example: Richard B. Carter, *Descartes' medical philosophy: the organic solution to the mind-body problem* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983); Gregor Sebba, "Some Open Problems in Descartes Research," *Modern Language Notes* 75, no. 3 (1960).

<sup>286</sup> Susan Bordo, *The flight to objectivity: essays on Cartesianism and culture* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987).

relationship to privacy and “flight” is much more ambivalent, involving a complicated mediation between interior and exterior, city and pasture, withdrawal and presence.<sup>287</sup>

We should not forget, in all of this proliferation of new toys—both cameras and rationalities—a more mundane, slower, more consistent line, from Plato’s cave, through the architectural retreat and studies of the scholastics, to *the classroom*. (The camera obscura emerges out of an architecture.) It took rapid urbanization for it to fully set in, and now continues to fundamentally shape the educational landscape. Rather than struggle to leave existing caves and factories, they are soon constructed and multiplied. The modern classroom, the legacy of institutional urban educational, is created, built and mandated as the very site of education. It is as if, in the strange narrative of progress, one must first go down in order to leave. One is both condemned to interiority and protected by it, as both prison and womb. The very thing that makes the cave so dangerous for Plato, its unreality, is what is now utilized as a natal space. School is not “the real world,” and it both protects and prepares the student for its dangers. If the city is a cave, one escapes the cave by turning it inside out, leaving hell on the outside. One retreats into a representational space where one can learn of a world more engaging than the drab or dangerous one outside the door.<sup>288</sup> The classroom, for all of its apparent ordinariness still manages to be the place where we practice how to sit and look. Should we say that this is the dominant technique through which education is passed on,

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<sup>287</sup> Kevin Dunn, “A Great City is a Great Solitude”: Descartes’s Urban Pastoral,” *Yale French Studies*, no. 80 (1991).

<sup>288</sup> One only has to watch *The Matrix* to see this strange logic at work. There “the real world” is so decimated that the educational battle must be fought in the more vivid world of the mind. In the cavernous depths of the real world, one is always on the run, buying time, hoping for a victory elsewhere. But the matrix/womb is the place of true leverage, representing the chance to reinvent oneself by sheer force of mind. If it is an escapist fantasy, it is not, for all of that, significantly different from the existing educational logic.

making use of what media is available? Or is it that the practice of education is largely a training in how to orient in these ways. Just as the prisoner in the cave is made to look up to the light, we could say that the classroom, and the media, technology and apparatus that arrange themselves around an in it, are navigated by way of any number of strategies for eliciting proscribed ways of looking. Or more importantly, perhaps eliciting proscribed orientations, postures and gestures, through the orientation of the gaze. From blackboard to schoolbook, reading from left to right, arranged in rows, or circling, to see and be seen in a certain way asks us to hold and move our bodies just so.

This is the altogether more pedestrian insight. That in school, we are learning to move. Physical education is an oxymoron. What is at stake is the nature of that movement: both what it allows or doesn't allow but also, what we imagine it is. Could it be that despite our fascination with new technologies, with smart classrooms, placing laptops in every classroom, we are actually enacting in so many ways, a very old apparatus? Martha Wertheim, in *The Pearly Gates of Cyberspace*, shows that our fascination with technology is that it continues to offer us a virtual utopia, the essential parameters of which were sketched out already in the Medieval Ages.<sup>289</sup> The Internet is an upgraded heaven. Of course, as we have seen, this story goes even further back. But what we might miss in all of this is the quite specific scenarios that we continue to create around educational interiors and the fixing and regulation of bodies, and in particular the ways in which they repeat and propagate.

Take, for example, the shift that occurs in how we conceive of the scientific method, as Hobbes is trounced by the "low" techniques of Boyle. We should not be surprised to find that

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<sup>289</sup> Margaret Wertheim, *The pearly gates of cyberspace: a history of space from Dante to the Internet* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1999).

that the issue orients around a strange interior, in particular a vacuum chamber. Boyle, rather than weighing in on the theoretical debate between plenists and vacuists, sets to work simply measuring things. First, though, he develops a costly apparatus that allows him to use a transparent glass container for the experiment. Transparency. To this he coupled a relationship to the masses...

Quickly, as Bruno Latour describes it in *We Have Never Been Modern*, glossing Shapin:

Boyle and his colleagues abandoned the certainties of apodeictic reasoning in favor of doxa. This doxa was not the raving imagination of the credulous masses, but a new mechanism for winning support of one's peers. [...] Boyle relied on a parajudicial metaphor: credible, trustworthy, well-to-do witnesses gathered at the scene of the action can attest to the existence of a fact, the matter of fact, even if they do not know its true nature. So he invented the empirical style that we still use today.<sup>290</sup>

Latour points out that Boyle's repertoire was not new. What was new was the introduction of a non-human observer. The gathered witnesses were not only not to opine, but to simply register the register itself. *Can we agree that something was indicated?* The transparency of the glass is simply the light filled version of the camera obscura, letting only the smallest opening. You can see everything, but only to testify that you saw this or that inert body "showing, signing, writing, and scribbling on laboratory instruments." The interior merely gives off signs to gathered witnesses. The inside eludes, simply passing on effects to the effected, who will then pass on their testimony. The transparent vacuum gives up its secrets but in code, or in a kind of anti-code, just what they are, nothing more. So how does what happens in this private space spread, taking on the quality of a scientific law?

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<sup>290</sup> Bruno Latour, *We have never been modern* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993), 18.

The answer is that it never becomes as universal—not at least in the epistemologist’s terms! Its network is extended and stabilized. [...] By following the reproduction of each prototype air pump throughout Europe, and the progressive transformation of a piece of costly, not very reliable and quite cumbersome equipment, into a cheap black box that gradually becomes standard equipment in every laboratory, the authors bring the universal application of a law of physics back within a network of standardized practices.<sup>291</sup>

Repeatability. A standardized environment. A box, arranged, and sucked of air, will sign. The expense of transparency (primarily to allow you to see what you are doing is setting things up, by hand each time, before this too can be mechanized) turns opaque. The miniaturized camera obscura now displaces the view back outside to read the dials or printout. In this process of refinement it becomes cheap and pervasive. It replicates its results by replicating its sealed conditions.

Nevertheless, for all of this ascertaining of a procedural and pragmatic science, replicated in the ways in much the which we regulate the “testing” system so pervasive in modern education, we have not, for all of that, escaped this *dilemma* of the black box of the classroom: As good scientists we can step back and let the interior mechanisms report back to us. But then we are left speculating about what happens in the classroom as a kind of mysterious and mythic place. Teachers are both turned into automata and feared as either defective equipment, monstrous, sexual, too conservative, too liberal, and so on. That is, the more the classroom is rendered as a repeatable experiment in an isolated and hence replicable scenario, the more data comes out, the more we fear we can’t see in. And the more we project our demons into the vacuum.

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<sup>291</sup> Ibid., 24.

Indeed, much has been made of one of the qualities of such dark interiors as the camera obscura. As Plato had once argued that we are facing the wrong way, turned around, now we see the inversions of this inversion. First, in order to see more clearly, one should turn away from the object, constrain the light itself, and turn towards the image. But second this image itself, due to the properties of how the light passes through the pinhole, is reversed: left is right, and up is down. But just as the body comes to the fore as an observer *that is itself studied*, this inversion becomes a metaphorical inversion. Relying on the actual inversion, it comes to stand for an inversion of ideology itself.

Sarah Kofman writes, in *Camera Obscura of Ideology*, tracing the force of this *figure* of the camera obscura through the thought of Marx, Freud, and Nietzsche:

Camera obscura: this was also, in certain monasteries, the place where monks disciplined themselves, a dark place where sexual prohibitions were transgressed, and where everything that was meant to be hidden took place. It is the very symbol of the veil. Ideology, the camera obscura, here takes on all those connotations which hold true equally for unconscious and mythical thought. Ideology represents real relationships veiled, under cover. It functions, not as a transparent copy obeying the laws of perspective, but rather, as a simulacrum: it disguises, burlesques, blurs real relationships. To this, Marx opposes the value of clarity, light, transparency, truth, rationality. The camera obscura functions, not as a specific technical object whose effect is to present, in inverted form, real relationships, but rather, as an apparatus for occultation, which plunges consciousness into darkness, evil and error, which makes it become dizzy and lose its balance. It is an apparatus which renders real relationships elusive and secret.<sup>292</sup>

We note, of course, all of the usual elements, passed through one more time, this time linked up to ideology. But this should also cause us to reflect on how it is the figure of inversion itself that is being revealed. You do not pull aside the actual veil, because then you would lose sight of the inverted desire, it would be shown to be a mere mechanism. It is not that science

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<sup>292</sup> Sarah Kofman, *Camera obscura, of ideology* (London: Athlone Press, 1998), 14.



protects us from this ideology, it is that ideology pervades the mechanisms of science. The black box that controls for the human dark side is itself monstrous in its repeatability, its indifference to light. “There is no eye without its camera obscura, even that of science. If science had an eye.”<sup>293</sup> If science *were* an eye, we could say, an array of eyes blinking out signs to other eyes.

The image of classroom doors springs to mind. Any teacher learns early on that whether the door is open or closed matters, as does who is allowed to open and close it, cross its threshold, and when. (And any administrator will learn to read the signs and rhythms of a school by which doors are open and which closed.) A closed or open door will establish a certain parameter of behaviors and expectations about what kinds of signs are now permitted. Students will usher from one classroom to the next, bearing signs, themselves a series of signs blinked from another classroom. When we close the door, establishing privacy, what is that? Have we established a bulwark against the machine, or are we assembling and mustering the next set of missives—signs of privacy?

On the one hand we, again, might find this mechanization of the black box horrifying. This difficulty, even when we are *in the classroom*, or can see into it, of distinguishing agency from mechanization. On the other, we could say that this is precisely the *interest* of the classroom, one of the reasons why we might continue to show up and lean in. An odd question might be, why do we appreciate magic tricks? On the one hand, they are often unbearably, even necessarily, flimsy or awkward. A whole issue of style, even of accessories, runs through

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<sup>293</sup> Ibid., 18.

magic, but never without a level of painfulness.<sup>294</sup> And the structure itself, at face value, should hardly keep us (and maybe often shouldn't, even when it does). As Jerry Seinfeld famously put it: 'All magic is "Here's a quarter, now it's gone. You're a jerk. Now it's back. You're an idiot. Show's over."' We are not far off from the classroom, where often the staging itself receives even less careful attention. Where, after all, are you going to go? On the other hand, even in these absurd conditions, a hasty stage, a few flimsy props, we are enthralled. Is it because we have been initiated into some mystery, believing for a brief moment in magic before we return to the street? Or is it that we find precisely the ambivalence of interest? This proliferation and disappearance of objects.

Literally the most brilliant, in the sense of transparent, example of this is Penn & Teller's version of the classic cup and balls routine. Not only do they explain what they are doing, which laws of magic they are revealing and breaking, but—showing that we have not yet left Boyle and the influence of his glass enclosure—they perform the trick with clear cups, showing every move. But rather than this being the cover for another layer of sleight, something quite magical happens. By hiding nothing, they wind up not so much revealing the deception as finding the ineffable mystery in our attention itself. Seeing precisely what is happening, we realize we have no idea what is happening.

This is the oddity of Descartes' speculating on the possibility of an evil genius that may, in theory, be deceiving him. Nothing appears to be hidden; the accumulated errors of thought

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<sup>294</sup> Not the least of which is a style of speaking. We even to some extent recognize *the voice* of a magician as existing within a certain recognized range, much as we can often discern that it is a classroom who's door is open from the implication of the voice being emitted, distinct from any content or context. But this is but one critical accoutrement, *patter*. The kind of voice you use is also related to the kinds of objects you use. Do you wear colorful silk and produce birds? A black mask and betray secrets? Do you speak theatrically and do tricks with a pocket square and a top hat, ordinary items, but of another time? And so on... Everything signals and matters, but nothing has meaning.

are as self evident as the shoddy and crumbling buildings and labyrinthine streets of European cities that he indicates as the primary cause for concern. But since nobody will let him raze and rebuild a city he will perform a similar operation in his own synechdocal mind. It is here that he is confronted with this thought of a demon deceiver, an inverted god. Because although he will cite all sorts of possible discrepancies and madneses—fanciful half-animals, or madmen believing that their heads are made of earthenware, or glass—the point is that the *sense* of distinctness or of vagueness is itself inadequate. Being awake is like being asleep, and vice versa, in the sense that they are both ambivalent. The potential of the demon is not in *hiding* something, or performing some sleight *within* the sensational world, but of a complete transparency of the opaque itself: the external as a whole shows itself. This is the tantalizing danger. This is why Descartes can proceed along dual lines, merely speculating on the seat of their intersection.

Thus, lest we think we have left behind primitive notions such as skulls, we may note Descartes' elaborate studies of the human brain, oddly hollow, and with the pineal gland at its center tilting to the spectacle that makes it through the boney walls. Again, it was as if, in order to know the exterior one had to lock oneself up carefully on the inside—a matter of angles, and discretion, perhaps. But yet again, we see the odd doubling of exteriors and openings: one apparently “real,” and the other for display purposes. The elusive interior turns out to be another kind of exterior, or theater. In it there is no content, only a chair and a screen, a man and a scene, a gland in a glade. Two kinds of exterior. Likewise for openings: a pinhole and a missing drape or wall, or an eye and a missing section of skull. In the diagrams of both camera obscura and brain, we witness the strange logic of the cutaway, which can only

disclose the apparatus of transmission by making the transmission impossible in the process. A camera flooded with light is not a camera.

It is as if, to make one's discretion known, one must risk an indiscretion, and of course, the murderous masses. Descartes, for example, in a stage whisper about those who would receive him poorly, in *Discourse on Method*, shows us not so much a peek behind the curtain, as a theoretical display of such a showing:

In this they seem to me like a blind man, who, to fight without a handicap against someone who is sighted, makes his opponent go into the depths of a very dark cave.... For my principles being very simple and very evident, I would, by publishing them, be doing almost the same as if I were to open some windows and make some light of day enter that cave where they have descended to fight.<sup>296</sup>

Back to caves, then, and hypothetical illuminations. Is this not the trouble with black boxes? They tease us with disclosure. They are compelling precisely to the extent to which they are not disclosed. But if a secret is never disclosed, then it also fails to be compelling. Thus secrets, to work, must continue to leak. As Deleuze and Guattari reveal in *A Thousand Plateaus*:

In short, the secret, defined as a content that has hidden its form in favor of a simple container, is inseparable from two movements that can accidentally interrupt its course or betray it, but are nonetheless an essential part of it: something must ooze from the box, something will be perceived through the box or in the half-opened box.<sup>297</sup>

The longer this betrayal is deferred, the less one can speak of a secret *per se*, and the more we approach the infinite form of secrecy itself. But such a move has a cost. The specific content now becomes impossible to manage. The secret becomes both all pervasive and banal at the same time.

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<sup>296</sup> René Descartes, *Discourse on method and Meditations* (Mineola, N.Y.: Dover Publications, 2003), Chapter 6.

<sup>297</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A thousand plateaus: capitalism and schizophrenia*, 288.

This might indicate that the function of secrets is rarely secrecy, but can serve same function as disclosure. E.g., the function of airport security asking if you packed your own bags is not to disclose a threat *per se*, but to check for agreement: do you agree that we should be worried together? Nevertheless, a fundamental uncertainty cleaves to the scenario. *I can see that you appear to agree...* But even the agreement troubles, because you are also, in complying, confessing that you are potentially criminal, or criminally negligent. But outrage or joking is also prohibited. The student insisting, “But I have done nothing wrong!” has only proved the need for them to go to the Principle’s Office. The aim, we could say, is not truth, but this stasis, this unsettling ambiguity even, *where it no longer matters*, so that the procedure itself can be enacted. Descartes’ dilemma is that he may forget to remember, sliding back into complacency.

Likewise, the ambivalence of the secret is a *shibboleth*. Sartre insisted upon this in his treatment of groups-in-fusion, trying to think the bond that will allow a group to act as a resistive element by turning in on itself as a secret.<sup>298</sup> If we presuppose a totalizing group, then the pledge that founds it begins to unravel. Attempting to delimit a protected interior, origin, or content, the act of pledging is both necessary and destabilizing.<sup>299</sup> One finds oneself already pledged from birth, by the past of others. One finds that, even before the pledge itself, one has already pledged, has already agreed to pledge. The order to pledge is “Let us swear.” We who

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<sup>298</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, *Critique of dialectical reason* (New York: Verso, 1991).

<sup>299</sup> Is this not the ambivalent relationship that Fraternities and Sororities have to their host institution? On the one hand, this particularly overt display of old school pageantry, ritual, hazing and pledging—taking seriously what the institution itself must be careful to distance itself from—exists only in relationship to the school, fulfilling a particular function. And on the other hand, they function as a secret by differentiating themselves from each other and the host, thus becoming problematic disrupters. Not because they don’t believe, but because they paradoxically, in their random specificity, dislocate belief, are pure rampant belief. In the movie *Animal House* everything is set in chaotic motion by John Belushi’s character who wears a sweatshirt that reads simply, “COLLEGE.”

are already an *us*. It is not possible for an individual to swear. Just as the first violence is already a counter-violence, there is no first pledge within a group (although a ritual may be serial, and may operate according to a founding origin.)

Secrets always seem to get buried, bring us back to the ground, and to a deep past. But what if this itself is the secret: the illusive formation of a past? We should remember the function of the origin myth for the Athenians. Or we could look to another, apparently more modern, story of emergence from the ground, unearthed in a brilliant treatment of Kant by Diane Morgan, in *Kant Trouble*.<sup>300</sup> (By doing so, simply highlighting this continual “modern” gesture, by which urban sophistication plays at ritual, masking the point that Bruno Latour makes: we have never been modern.) Looking at Kant’s debt to an architonic mode of reasoning, Morgan shows that this itself is troubled by architecture’s own displacement in the monumentality of the Follies found in landscape gardening, as well as the secrecy of the Freemasons. The gardens were a kind of Labyrinth of a beautiful nature populated with a fake, miniaturized(!), and pre-crumbled architecture of the past. A bucolic post-apocalypse? We cannot follow this scintillating thread as long as we should, but let us pull out Morgan’s example from Goethe’s *Elective Affinities*, detailing the ceremony of laying the foundation stone for a pavilion in the garden.

Although this building was purely for the use of the property owners, the whole village has to attend the initiation ceremony. When built, the villagers will not have access to this pavilion, but this moment of laying down the foundation stone is seen as a parallel of the communal laying down of the law; hence

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<sup>300</sup> Morgan, *Kant trouble: the obscurities of the enlightened*. We should simply note this “trouble” a kind of obscurity that both plagues and infuses Kant’s work, the blindspots and ambiguities of an *architectural model* being a kind of productive failure, the source of a secret pearl. The trouble of this “trouble” is its ambivalence. That a secret *works* independent of its professed origin or content still says nothing of the potential cost and division of the work. Just as Morgan’s work breaths new life into the movements of Kant, it also opens the difficult questions concerning the cost, the hidden labor, of such productivity.

attendance is obligatory. [...] This episode depicts the re-enactment of an event that has never taken place as such: when, at what point in time, before they were actually citizens, did all the citizens get together to give their unanimous assent to the law? [...] Indeed, we can say that as the community is never actually founded as such, what is being demarcated is an artificial 'event' that can form only part of a series of repetitions.<sup>301</sup>

The ritual totality of a community, fueled by a ritual of a foundational event, we might surmise, works not be creating or even installing the illusion of a bond or common law. The villager's presence may have been obligatory, but one would be hard pressed to imagine that they believed it. But the land owner himself would be foolhardy to truly believe that was the case as well. Instead, the enactment heightens the ambiguity, thus allowing the essential structure—not the foundation stone, but the gutter, the irrigation ditch that will separate out and enact a high and low city, a cultivated land and a toiled soil—to emerge all the more clearly. This is part of the effect of the Follies themselves. Morgan shows us the garden house of an estate, shaped like the base of a fallen column, and actually lived in by the owner:

This is neither a garden-house pretending to be something else (i.e. just a column) nor a teasing structure that we later discover to be a garden house. Instead, more interestingly, it is a garden-house playing at being a sham garden-house. As a consequence, it is a folly: it pretends to be what it is. This crazy theatricality links up with the 'demonstrative' architecture evoked [earlier] in the Masonic section: this building stages or demonstrates architectural inadequacy. 'Follies' in general, i.e. not just garden-houses, confirm this proposition: these temporary constructions, roughly patched together, are not supposed to convince the viewer that he/she is actually confronted with, for example, a Greek temple. Part of the pleasure, which can be unsettling, is seeing the wood and plaster that barely keeps the edifice together and discovering, in some cases, its one-dimensionality [...] Instead of being convincing, they are intended to act like a *tromp-l'oeil* that conveys *illusion*.<sup>302</sup>

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<sup>301</sup> Ibid., 37.

<sup>302</sup> Ibid., 14.

The effect works, we could say, by not working. *Which can be unsettling...* Indeed. Pleasure then, but not linked so much to an originary past but to the ability to kill off that dream, and treat it precisely as an illusion. In which one lives... Or which will house *just one*. The illusion of a secret—e.g., the promise of the educational content of schools, curriculum as object—is not intended to fool anyone, but to maintain a complicity around its absence or banality. Whatever happens at school, it is something else. *What did you do at school today?* is a question aimed at the illusion itself. The proper response to this Sphinxian riddle is “nothing” not because it maintains the secret, and the sullen barrier between child and parent, insider and outsider, but because it releases the dilapidated pleasure of the illusion. School is barely held together, is missing a few dimensions. Bond more than barrier: *You know that, Mom. We have this in common. How many times do I have to swear it?*

The difficulty that swearing, in trying to manage only manages to highlight, is this dispersal and potential treachery. Creating an inside, no matter how pleasantly illusory also shows the seams, the ripping points. The villagers have to cross the ditch to arrive at the founding ceremony. It becomes difficult to know where one stands. The secret pledge of a group of resistance fighters shares something in common with those following Hitler’s orders, only it isn’t the secret itself. Arendt writes:

Still, the secrecy did have a practical purpose. Those who were told explicitly of the Führer’s orders were no longer mere ‘bearers of orders,’ but were advanced to ‘bearers of secrets’ and a special oath was administered to them. [...] For whatever other reasons the language rules had been devised, they proved of enormous help in the maintenance of order and sanity. [...] Moreover, the very term ‘language rule’ (*Sprachregelung*) was itself a code name; it meant what in ordinary language would be called a lie.<sup>303</sup>

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<sup>303</sup> Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: a report on the banality of evil* (New York: Penguin Books, 1994), 84-5.



A code for codes: let us agree that things will proceed in an orderly fashion. Order, however, shows itself as the desire to be willing to play at secrecy. The trouble comes not when people lie, or even act on it, but when they find themselves compelled to believe it, miss the intentional cracks and gaps that serve not only an aesthetic function but also as the underground system. “Eichmann’s insistence on not only carrying out the ‘letter’ of the ‘Law’ by fulfilling his duty but also complying with the ‘spirit’ of it—being particularly zealous in implementing the ‘Final Solution’—is a grotesque parody of Kantian moral philosophy. Part of the horror comes from the *recognition* of the distorted theory of Kant.”<sup>304</sup> But perhaps Morgan is too quick here. Part of the dilemma is that, despite this recognition, it is a “trouble” that plagues Kant’s own theory, itself wavering continually on the line between parody and reason—this blind spot wherein a *practice* of ethics hinges on following a protocol of imaging the actions of a certain kind of reasonable figure. But this figure itself is itself situated in relationship to an excessive other that haunts the Kantian architecture in various guises. For example, in the first preface to the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant suggests that, in over-reaction to despotic formulations of reason, “skeptics, a species of nomads, despising all settled modes of life, broke up from time to time all civil society.”<sup>305</sup> Are we to think the realm of ends as being one of settled life, and excluding the nomad? This would entail a long look at Kant in relationship to property law. Let one example indicate this direction, taking us back to another

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<sup>304</sup> Morgan, *Kant trouble: the obscurities of the enlightened*, 190. Or in another context, Žižek explores a variation of the Lacanian reading of Sade as the truth of Kant, in *Kant avec Sade*, but rather as the *symptom* of Kant’s betrayal of his own discovery: “...the obscene Sadeian *jouisseur* is a stigma bearing witness to Kant’s ethical compromise; the apparent ‘radicality’ of this figure (the Sadeian here’s willingness to go to the end in his Will-to-Enjoy) is a mask of its exact opposite.” Žižek, *The parallax view*, 94.

<sup>305</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of pure reason* (Aalen Germany: Scientia, 1982), ix.

founding narrative. In “Conjectural Beginning of Human History” Kant suggests that the herdsman, “having done his damage, can always take his cattle and go elsewhere, escaping all responsibility.”<sup>306</sup> In defending against such behavior the land owners would need to come together to form a civic order as a way of administering justice. In a very cursory way, we could say that the problem posed by Kant is *how we imagine* the responsible figure, who amongst other things refrains from lying. At the very least we should be troubled by the ways in which movement is linked with disorder, particularly given the linkage, both real and imagined, created and displaced, between Jews and mercantile commerce. Kant will always seem to prefer a kind of constrained and organized repetition of an idealized movement over that of bumblers or nomads. Bringing us full circle, Kant will suggest in his writings on education that the positive act of education—amongst other things, learning to articulate and formulate statements of various kinds—is prepared for through a negative act of physical education. So, for example, “Children...are first sent to school, not so much with the object of their learning something, but rather that they may become used to sitting still and doing exactly as they are told.”<sup>307</sup> Where does this take us, this continual folding of caricature and responsibility, of different relationships to breaks in the ground, of images of truth and lies, of architecture and stumbling? If we can say without hesitation that Eichmann’s grotesque of Kant is horrifying, doesn’t it trouble our dream of a *proper*, grounded Kantian? Here Morgan takes us closest to the horror, quoting Arendt:

Seen through the eyes of the ideology, the trouble with the camps is almost that they make too much sense, that the execution of the doctrine is too consistent.”  
The actual boundary between the correct amount of order and ‘too much’ is

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<sup>306</sup> Immanuel Kant, *On history* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1963), 63.

<sup>307</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Education* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1960), 3.

indistinct, although clearly there is excess. Where does the social actually become its opposite? This human inability to police boundaries efficiently is also the difference between one individual's crime, which can be condemned and forgotten, and one that will never cease to be judged, which cannot be forgotten.<sup>308</sup>

But again, we see this odd blind spot, as if despite the clear excess, "too much order," we cannot avoid the Kantian formulation of our failure: inefficient policing of the boundary. What potentially slips past is the architectural form itself, as if the boundaries themselves were a given, just indistinct. Our human failing is that in the transition between kinds of city arrangements we get disoriented, and fall into maintaining camps. Or that our grasping hand, trying to keep the smooth flow of turning going, botches it.

This is the difficulty of these barriers or thresholds. Wrapping ourselves in them like cloaks they turn out to be breezy, or woven too tight, so that we can't put them on, believing in the darkness resides the origin itself. Deleuze and Guattari thus poke fun at the Freudian secret key: "The news travels fast that the secret of men is nothing, in truth nothing at all. Oedipus, the phallus, castration, 'the splinter in the flesh'—that was the secret? It is enough to make women, children, lunatics, and molecules laugh."<sup>309</sup> Best to stave off such embarrassments. If the secret must leak, then, one way to defer the joke indefinitely is to not show the contents, but to *show the showing* of the contents. Just enough of a semblance of order. To illustrate, let us return to Athena.

As we recall, Athena, having avoided rape by Hephaestus, wipes his semen off her leg and throws the cloth to the ground. From the earth Erichthoneus is born. But let us follow the

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<sup>308</sup> Morgan, *Kant trouble: the obscurities of the enlightened*, 190.

<sup>309</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A thousand plateaus: capitalism and schizophrenia*, 289.

myth further: Athena places him in a locked chest, and entrusts the chest to three sisters, prohibiting them from looking within. The legends vary, but as Apollodorus has it:

But the sisters of Pandrosus opened it out of curiosity, and beheld a serpent coiled about the babe; and, as some say, they were destroyed by the serpent, but according to others they were driven mad by reason of the anger of Athena and threw themselves down from the acropolis.<sup>310</sup>

According to others, Erichthoneus himself was half human, half serpent. What we might notice however, is how the whole story functions by way of such hearsay. The function of the secret is even clearer when it is linked to the Eleusinian Mysteries: yearly initiation rites during which several maidens would be selected as *Arrephoroi*, servants of Athena, to carry a locked basket down from the Acropolis. The content of the basket is speculated on till this day, aided by the idea that unlike Pandrosus and her curious sisters, neither the *Arrephoroi* nor the priestess herself who would receive the basket looked inside.

From mythic tale of sacrifice to repeatable initiation. It suffices that *someone else* once looked—and paid the ultimate price. This becomes the odd structural relationship between interiority and sacrifice. Someone must pay the price, and so a few are chosen. But by extension, they stand for the symbolic sacrifice of the rest, who agree to behave as if they saw it and died. An actual disclosure would be most problematic—either because it would be laughable, or because the sacrifice would be too great. That is, one risks either the content itself dying (as in Schrodinger’s cat, for instance), or the viewer themselves being consumed (*Repo Man*). Instead, the educational contract is to pretend that we, like everyone else have been initiated. For that, the basket must remain closed, it’s contents the subject of legend.

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<sup>310</sup> Apollodorus, *Library*, 3.14.6.

Ernesto Laclau, in *On Populist Reason*, argues that this “emptiness of the signifier”—the way in which the rallying cry of the people tends to lack any specific *meaning*—is not a sign of the ignorance of the mass movements, but the very thing that allows them to work, to rally. Does not “Education” serve as such an “empty signifier”? Something that anyone can get behind, precisely because its actual content eludes us? Like the Magic Mystery Box, sold to aspiring magicians, which contains one amazing *but undisclosed trick*, it promises a value in excess of its retail price: you may not know what it is, but it is more than worth it!<sup>311</sup> And like the box, it is best left closed, deferred, lest we are disappointed by the cheap cardboard tricks it may contain.

Where does that leave us then, space travelers? Does it not remain for us to reflect, not so much on our perpetual displacement, the way in which we manage to always wind up on the outside, dreaming of home, but instead on the uses of the dream itself? The ways in which the “event horizon” of education drives us (as if we were conducting Schrodinger’s experiment, oscillating between life and death, hope and despair) into a kind of frozen frenzy. “Education today...” we say. “Inner-city education....” “No Child Left Behind...” All implying that we could cross the threshold into the crushing blackness without noticing. Or too late. What other ways might we still be able to dream?

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<sup>311</sup> [http://www.ted.com/talks/j\\_j\\_abrams\\_mystery\\_box.html](http://www.ted.com/talks/j_j_abrams_mystery_box.html)

## Or Conversely, A Speculative Theory of the Outside: Ducks and Half-Bridges

Couldn't we just as easily say that we dream the other way around? Inside out? That rather than it being interiority that drives and eludes us, that we are always busily barricaded *inside*, occupying ourselves with a theory of the outside. This would be Plato's Cave, but where the prisoners are in on it, masquerading at times as guards, or teachers.<sup>312</sup> Education: if you come sit in this room we will *mediate* the outside for you, tell you all about it. "Why," you ask? "So that you may leave, of course, and know what you are seeing. The real world is a jungle. Full of cut-throats and others that you'll want to see coming and get a leg up on." But we should understand this as a mechanism of the interior itself, simply another variation on decadence—here you will find everything that would be scarce on the outside. This would be the extreme reading of The Eagles' song, *Hotel California*...

Last thing I remember, I was  
Running for the door  
I had to find the passage back  
To the place I was before  
'Relax,' said the night man,  
We are programmed to receive.  
You can checkout any time you like,  
But you can never leave!

It is not, in the end, the decadence that keeps them—the song on the surface being a critique of empty consumption—but the lack of an actual exit. There is no outside, the memory itself being simply a further decadence, another shadow.

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<sup>312</sup> This is the second "postmodern" re-reading, or retelling along a different variant line, that Žižek enumerates: "...what if, (along the lines of Peter Sloterdijk's Spheres) we invert the meaning of the cave: it is cold and windy out in the open, on the earth's surface, too dangerous to survive there, so people themselves decided to dig out the cave to find a shelter/home/sphere?" Žižek, *The parallax view*, 162.

This is the difficult logic of the surrogate home—a hotel, a prison, the endless road itself, a school, or “home” itself, since as Phillip points out “there is no place like home, not even home itself. It is both too barren and too full of distractions. The drama concerns leaving, and it is the drama that makes the space non-indifferent, if we can put it thus, drawing our attention. We could sketch out five stages for enacting a dramatic escape, learned along the way:

1. Build a cell, or Labyrinth. Or locate an existing one. Or discover that you are already in one.
2. Check in, get yourself incarcerated, matriculate, or confirm your suspicion.
3. Find the 2<sup>nd</sup> system of pathways. This will be your way out, (even if you boldly walk out the front door) and every system has them. (Hint: sewage. Also, “old-timers.”)
4. Act normal. You will need to nominally blend in, even if this means acting like a recalcitrant or model prisoner. (Do not be surprised if they, in turn, are doing the same thing.) Use this opportunity to scatter the dirt from your tunnel, and to forage.
5. Effect your escape. Realize, afterwards, that this was life, and that the outside is just another inside.

In this scenario, the drama repeats itself by crafting inner space as a project or projection of a dream of emergence. The inside serves as a kind of surrogate outside, through which we may enact a kind of immanent escape. This can be conceived as a kind of practice run, or the escape itself—one finds a home away from home, escaping by settling in. In an inversion of our previous position, in which we are always displaced, trying to find our way

into the heart of things, we could *also* say that it is one of the great givens of education that in order to learn something one must first come inside. (Only then can you engage in field trips, or a year “abroad” in some other city.) But we could go even further and suggest that this strategy of educational interiority represents a speculative theory of the outside. To be inside is to open up the possibility of thinking the outside. But rather than discovering a “true” outside, we find ourselves encountering an outside that turns out to be only more interiority. In the Coen brothers’ movie, *Barton Fink*, Barton checks into a hotel in order to write The Great American Screenplay, one that will finally speak the experience of the street, the grit, lives of the people. But what ensues is a continual set of distractions. Instead of the world, he is transfixed, ear to the wall, listening to the sounds of the room next door. One way of imagining this is that there is in fact no outside as such. “The people” do not inhabit the streets, but are themselves hotel guests, traveling salesmen. Barton, distracted from his writing will engage in a series of fantasies of the shore, prompted by the photograph of a girl sitting on the beach which hangs above his typewriter like a kind of window or portal. But we recognize these pictures, don’t we, as a kind of aesthetic of the hotel itself, the photograph that comes with the frame? The faux familiarity that could be anywhere, anyone? Or the world maps that adorn the walls of classrooms and waiting rooms. News clippings and reading materials. The clipart and graphics that give the textbook its recognizable form. We recognize them as indicators, often impoverished, faded, or outdated, of the real world itself. But in some sense—was this not Descartes’ worry—they are more real than the real. School, rather than being the opposite of “the real world”—a kind of virtual space—is the very immediate working factory where we fabricate the concept of “the real” itself, invest our dreams in it, and then project it outside, out of our reach.



In the late sixties/early seventies, the architects Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown and Steven Izenour led an educational expedition to that hellish city of sin, that under normal circumstances requires that you drink of the waters of forgetting on your return, Las Vegas. Their reports back were a shock to the world of architecture for two reasons: first, that they would deign to take seriously the garish architecture that was simultaneously low and over the top; second, that there is surprisingly much to say about it. Amongst their insights was that Vegas can only be understood as “a strip,” a place viewed from and at the speed of cars. Going down, one discovers the desert flatness of a perpetual journey. The result of this organizational principle by which Las Vegas shows itself is that architecture itself becomes a kind of attractor of signs, signs as attractor, signs of attraction. Everything proceeds by way of drawing traffic in from the strip. The outside is simply a shuttle between interiors. Vegas promises behind closed doors the world, promises to be worldly. They proposed two modes in which this shunting happens: the Duck and the Decorated Shed. The Duck is a building whose formal structure is completely subsumed in the symbolic: a building that is shaped like a duck. (We might also recall the hotel in Coney Island shaped like a giant elephant.) The building becomes a sculpture. The Decorated Shed attracts the attention of passing cars by affixing ornament to the formal structure. The building wears, or is tucked in behind, its sign.

But we can go one step further. Just as inside each interior we find a simulated world—in which the sun never sets and people rehearse and mine the drama of being born and dying, desert and excess, through the symbolic form of currency—we might also think of the interior space created by schools as a kind of Decorated Shed *turned inside out*. Here the symbolic is converted back into a sign, represented on the blackboard, screen or bulletin board of the inside. A sign of the symbol, is a vision of a duck in and of itself. We might reflect for a moment

on this banal, ever present decoration of school, the bulletin board, which will oscillate between demonstrating “the content” of education and its “production” in the double sense that we speak of “student work” as both activity and object. The bulletin board as a note to ourselves: we project the idea of real ducks as symbolic decoration of the interior of the structure (which itself is simply an inverted billboard, a blank slate turned back on itself, like the white cube of an art gallery.)—*while, at the same time indicating that we are only pretending to be interested in ducks.* In other words, what is important is not ducks, but that the walls be decorated with the idea of the outside, represented by ducks.

This would bring us to one of the great puzzles of exteriority: how is it, that despite creating and projecting a “real world,” education can be seen as a kind of practice of ensuring that this world stay at a symbolic level. We might locate any number of maneuvers by which this is sustained. Let one example suffice: the half bridge.<sup>313</sup> Whether it is closing the achievement gap, or creating a bridge to a better future, or bridging disciplinary boundaries, school offers a vision of a way over the uncrossable. Yet a full bridge presents any number of very real problems. So, instead, in its place we get a half-bridge, occluded with fog, disappearing as a kind of horizon in the road, or a screen holding the image of the road continuing. Take for example, the new interdisciplinary science building at the corner of Columbia Universities' main campus.

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<sup>313</sup> One could, and perhaps should, include the stairway, these two images sharing many of the same functions, and perhaps even unthinkable without each other, in the way that the journey to or from the underworld must also cover ground, traverse a chasm or river. The Cooper Union's new marvel of a building for example, is built around a massive staircase. A kind of Duck turned inside out: the building is a staircase. And for all of its suggestion of being a kind of stairway to heaven, it ends, mysteriously nowhere, a little café. From below it deceptively looks like it either just ends abruptly, a last step hanging in space, or that it thus symbolically keeps going, past the skin of the building (which interestingly enough is double, a building clothed to look like a building.) And what one discovers, in inhabiting such a space, is that everyone makes use of the 2<sup>nd</sup> set of passageways, the back stairwells.

It is as if the University cannot help but express its conflicted logic. Here we can take our cue from a piece in *The New York Times*, appropriately enough entitled: “A Building Forms a Bridge Between a University’s Past and Future.”<sup>314</sup> This is, we might surmise, one of those inadvertent moments where the truth is articulated way more precisely than we are used to. The author, Nicolai Ouroussoff, could not have been more accurate when he writes:

It is also, not incidentally, a work of healing. Seen in the context of Columbia’s often tense relationship with its Harlem neighbors...the building is a gleaming physical expression of the university’s desire to bridge the divide between the insular world of the campus and the community beyond its walls.

Ouroussoff manages in this concise article, articulating and praising, to elucidate an entire dream work of the University. (It should go without saying that this vision is not confined to Columbia University.)

However, we should look more closely. First, we should note the specificity. It is not that it *bridges* the desire, it is a gleaming physical expression of the desire to bridge. Indeed, even a cursory glance at the building itself would show that, in setting out to dream and build a bridge, almost as if it were unavoidable, built a half-bridge, jutting out into the idea of the beyond. A kind of observation deck that speaks more of conquest, like the “bridge” of a ship looking out over the sea of Harlem that descends below it. In place of a crossing we find a series of switchbacks, and glass boundaries that serve as opaque barriers with a kind of cryptic frosted code leading to a space populated only with security guards themselves uneasily eking out a home. The “outside” eludes us. On the one hand, it is a kind of double scene. The glass walls of the observation deck serve in place of artwork, and the scene of people drinking coffee on the observation deck, when you look in from the street, gives every illusion of being

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<sup>314</sup> Nicolai Ouroussoff, "A Building Forms a Bridge Between a University’s Past and Future," *The New York Times*, February 8th 2011.

another outside. On the other hand, this series of ascents occludes and protects the view of another outside, the interior of the campus, a kind of walled garden, in which the horizon is turned inward.



Figure 10: A half-bridge of gleaming desire

Could we imagine this as the modern legacy of the intersection of the Prairie School of architecture and progressive education: a kind of educational pastoral marking a particular strategy of reworking the urban topology? In the Prairie School of architecture's rejection of neo-classical ornament and scale—school as urban citadel—we might see not simply a ruthless break with history, but an attempt to draw to the surface a perennial dream of education itself. As Kevin D. Murphy notes, progressive schools in Chicago in the early 20th century, for instance, represented a kind of inverted space: their interiors taking on the function of an idealized public space in which the city can come together. It is no doubt no accident that

American cities saw an upsurge in public parks as well. Architecturally, the long horizontals and the breaking of the barriers of the facade do not just intend to represent the prairie externally, but in some way to turn the city inside out. Or rather, outside in. A porous horizon in the midst of the city. And yet, as the barrier between inside and out is reduced, we see not so much a naturalized education, but the industrial workings of the city reflected in the school. The prairie becomes a factory. Or is it the other way around? As Murphy notes, the industrial skyscraper of Louis H. Sullivan was at home covered in terra cotta foliage. But even beyond that, can we find in the bare geometry, and stark materiality of even more stripped down forms an evocation of nature in the form of the plain itself? Skyscrapers as the vertical ascent of the plain? And what are we to make of the fact that this new building looks not so much like a duck, but an air-conditioned or radiator, its fins dissipating what?

We should note one last point from this example, and that is that the building serves itself as a kind of arcade, a covered street. Indeed, it makes evident a feature of most school buildings, the way in which a cluster of classrooms or disciplinary zones are arrayed around a network of hallways. As Carla Yanni points out in *The Architecture of Madness*, for all of the symbolic force invested in Foucault's astute analysis of Bentham's model of the Panopticon, the actual architecture of Insane Asylums, particularly in the United States followed a more homely pastoral model, directly at odds with the sense of the urban as itself the source of pathology.<sup>315</sup> Instead we find expressed a kind of country estate, oriented to nature, tucked behind a monumental façade, and utilizing wings, or detached pavilions (to aid in ventilation)—the hallways and pathways of which served as both regulators of activity and as a

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<sup>315</sup> Carla Yanni, *The architecture of madness : insane asylums in the United States* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007).

kind of home around which accommodations were spread. The exterior, we could say is on the inside, reflected as a series of hallways.

One way of imagining this it conceive of agency within this labyrinth as a kind of in-between. Interdisciplinary space. What makes us who we are is how we express our choice of navigating between classes or disciplines. To be a double major is to navigate the hallways in your own unique style. From this perspective, interdisciplinarity, especially now that the grand unifying visions of a meta-discipline have faded, becomes an emergent property of the disciplining of space itself: a kind of interior “healing bridge” or emergent network. But as always the labyrinth is thus a place of dangerous doubling, wandered by hybrid animals, mad patients. Think, for example, of the mischief that is the cinematic hallmark of the high school hallways between classes. As if to avoid even this simulated exterior, the hallways are utilized symbolically, cordially, virtually, but as an internal façade behind which we find a whole network of shortcuts, communications and escape routes. The more difficult question is to imagine what we are up to. It’s almost as if the game becomes to keep moving, navigating the corridors with a kind of vague hope. Indeed, this is one of the acute dangers of academic labyrinths, we could say the very thing that makes them labyrinths: we can always find something of interest, a hidden connection, a strange resonance, a secret passageway, a new book.

Or we are distracted by the spectacle itself. Žižek shows us the sense of the scene from *Brazil* in which the boss powerwalks through the hallways trailed by a cadre of people clamoring for his attention and to which he barks administrative signs.<sup>316</sup>

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<sup>316</sup> One might also cite the parody of the TV series, “The West Wing” by *Mad TV*: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SnxQk8C\\_-kE](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SnxQk8C_-kE)

The appearance of a nervous hyperactivity is, of course, a staged performance which masks a self-indulgent nonsensical spectacle of imitating, of playing “efficient administration.” Why do they walk around all the time? The leader whom they follow is obviously *not* on his way from one meeting to another—the meaningless fast walk around the corridors is all he does. [...] The Kafkaesque answer is, of course, that this entire performance is here to attract his gaze, staged for his eyes only. [...] intended to provoke the hero into addressing a demand to the group’s leader, who then snaps back nervously “Can’t you see how busy I am!”, or, occasionally, does the reverse: greets the hero as if he has been waiting for him for a long time, mysteriously expecting his plea. Lurking behind this misleading appearance of social critique or satire here is the *mystery of institution*.<sup>317</sup>

But to compound the mystery, would it have made a difference if he was headed into a room for a meeting? Do we escape it through our interest? In other words, can we escape through the acknowledgement of the classic compromise between sitting in meetings and pursuing one’s own studies, or between teaching and research? Is not part of the problem that we run a line of hope through the labyrinth as a way to keep going, or as Phillip suggested earlier, that we generate the labyrinth as a way of dawdling, but instead of finding a simple distinction between agency and passivity, we find ourselves running through the motions.

### **Towards a Materially Engaged, not Spatially Hopeful Pedagogy: Three Aberrant Principles**

We come back to this difficulty of movement, then, and some vague sense of the difference between being moved or constrained and moving oneself, taking one’s self into hand, or taking one’s hand to reshaping the labyrinth itself. Let us pose, not a solution, but a material and properly moving question, before posing three principles for exploring this further. As we have discovered, since the cave allegory, the question of movement has been

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<sup>317</sup> Žižek, *The parallax view*, 116-7.

plagued by the difference between real and feigned movement, between turning and twisting. The *techne* of our schooling practices has tended to reinforce this mythic gesture of dualism, showing us how to behave—in an embodied way—as if we do not have bodies. Rather than imagining that anything is solved by this odd game of false movements between inside and outside, mind and body, lower and higher city, we may want to consider it a question of movement in relation to itself.

In a TED Talk, Daniel Wopert cuts to the chase: “If you think about this question for any length of time, it’s blindingly obvious why we have a brain. We have a brain for one reason, and one reason only, and that is to produce adaptable and complex movements.”<sup>319</sup> Of course he will go on to present a fairly classic scenario about how this brain/movement relationship goes, in which the brain is simply a movement processor, thus drawing us right back into the dualism. Of particular difficulty in this approach, harking back to the eddies and catastrophes of Plato, is the way in which “noise” in the system is treated as a problem. In terms of academia, we could say that what is interesting is not that people are rational processors, saddled with the “negative consequences of noise” in the system (smart people behaving like children) but rather that the system as a whole has an inherent variability within it that allows for thoughtful movement—a perpetually uncertainty around childhood and adulthood, intelligence and stupidity that cannot be oriented and put to use as quickly as Plato would have it. In other words, we should take this first premise of his talk with more seriousness, and realize that movement isn’t about commanding proper movements in relationship to a variable world complicated by noise, but rather that this noise and variability *is* movement, of which we are a part. It is not that the brain needs to solve for movement, as if it were a

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<sup>319</sup> [http://www.ted.com/talks/daniel\\_wolpert\\_the\\_real\\_reason\\_for\\_brains.html](http://www.ted.com/talks/daniel_wolpert_the_real_reason_for_brains.html)



hardware/software problem. (This is why robotics struggles: it borrows this framework from education.) Instead, the brain and body are inherently in movement and are emergent properties of this environment of which they are a part. So let us propose the same for that robotic-brain that we call school. What if it is not that robots are poor movers, and we are constantly trying to teach ourselves how to teach a robot to move better, but rather that it is through our fascination with robots that we learn about poor movement? We fetishize the cutting edge of robotics—how robots can learn given their crude nature, and inability to handle noise and complex variability. However, why do we bother to care about this oddly retrograde frontier? As Wolpert points out, any 3 year old can trounce the most sophisticated robot. What if it is a disguise for our real interest in learning how to be more robotic? Schools, in only an apparent paradox, would be the place where movement unlearns. They are incredibly sophisticated at this.

But again, we should remember the ambivalence that runs through this. If school is the place where we learn, as Bataille put it, to use our right over our left, no matter how adroit our left, it is also the place where we have much to learn about what we are doing when we are doing that, and introducing variations into the repetition. It is not a matter of escape, but neither is it a matter of interiority, of retreat into study. If we want to be able to tell a different story, find other ways of moving, we need to feel our way to a theory and practice of educational action that is materially engaged, not spatially hopeful. Toward that end, let us explore three principles towards a materially engaged pedagogy, each attempting to trouble or twist a classic repetition: a perceptual twist on Descartes' hyperbolic doubt, a principle of moving in relationship to architecture, and a mode of working with labyrinths.

## First Principle: Don't Believe in England

In the play, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*, Stoppard tells the story of Hamlet from the perspective of these two minor characters. The outcome is the same, but the difference it introduces is significant. At one point, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are passing time as their ship is *en route* to England, and bearing the letter that will order their demise. (Oh the dangers of crossing the sea to another city...) <sup>320</sup> Reflecting on how they can't seem to make any headway in this story that is not their own, Guildenstern laments:

GUIL: (leaping up): What a shambles! We're just not getting anywhere.

ROS: (mournfully): Not even England. I don't believe in it anyway.

GUIL: What?

ROS: England.

GUIL: Just a conspiracy of cartographers, you mean?

ROS: I mean I don't believe in it! (Calmer.) I have no image. <sup>321</sup>

We could imagine this as a kind of demonic variation on Descartes' principle of hyperbolic doubt, or the jaded indifference by which we are taught to substitute a show of things for belief. Rosencrantz of course knows they are going to England, and prefers not to speculate on conspiracy. It is above all not hopeful: it changes nothing, effects no escape. But we might say

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<sup>320</sup> Hamlet's sea voyage corresponds, says Deleuze, with the caesura, a break in time. 'Time is out of joint': "Demented time or time outside the curve which gave it a god, liberated from its overly simple circular figure, freed from the events which made up its content, its relation to movement is overturned [...] Time itself unfolds (that is, apparently ceases to be a circle) instead of things unfolding within it (following the overly simple circular figure.) It ceases to be cardinal and becomes ordinal, a pure *order* of time." Deleuze, *Difference and repetition*, 88. Nevertheless we should be cautious. The break itself, this caesura, nevertheless has its own cycles or resonances. Hamlet shares it, as Deleuze himself indicates, with Oedipus. As we have seen, the overly simple circle is never far from its break. In some uncertain way we could say that the circle can't complete itself without this gap. The gap is both the rupture and the possible recalibration. Hamlet, in striving to fix the disjoint in time, himself ruptures through the gap, is born. Deleuze continues, "as though the bearer of the new world were carried away and dispersed by the shock of the multiplicity to which it gives birth." But the second caution is to simply note that if time is decoupled from "movement," it is movement in this regulated circular sense. If anything, as in Plato, the eddying of movement, its uncertainty, begins to fly in this moment between eras.

<sup>321</sup> Stoppard, *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern are dead*, 107.

that it is an active decision to participate in the drama while not believing in the apparent nodes of power (what is England if not an edict?), and not engaging at the level of projections of the real.

### **Second Principle: “The Wall is the Shortest Distance Between Two Points”**

The second principle we borrow for *le Parkour*, or Free Running: a mode of moving through urban space in non-standard ways that is in some sense an extension of the project of the Situationists and the Surrealists before them (minus a scholarly posture, and infused with adrenaline.) When you don't believe in England, you don't affect a willful Cartesian secondary illusion: since what appears may be an illusion, I will try to *not see it*—but instead begin to simply relate to the terrain differently. Hence the second rule of thumb for a materially engaged pedagogy is that “the roof is the shortest distance between two walls.” How do we differentiate this, however, from the notion of “interdisciplinarity” in which freedom is found by moving differently between the disciplinary spaces? Like Stoppard's retelling of Hamlet, everything hinges on what you believe in. Rather than treating the walls as containers for disciplinary content, we can see them as forms with properties that can be used to different ends. Things are always more than they are. The roof, intended to protect the interior, also by its nature is the shortest distance between walls. Where the disciplinary architecture conceives of interiors and exteriors, we may simply let go of these inversions and see opportunities for trajectories that have nothing to do with the symbolic contents or projected realities.

### Third Principle, or rather, Two Field Lessons on Impromptu Architecture

But lest we imagine that it is all about freedom—a kind of movement as escape, either through running or a transformation into pure fluid—let us borrow two lessons on strategic blockage or constraint. We can take one from the radicals and another from the custodians of knowledge. The first lesson comes to us from any number of student uprisings, prison riots, and occupation movements aimed at disrupting an entrenched or overly codified and oppressive form—and that is that furniture, typically used to orient attention, carries within it a fundamental ambiguity that also allows them to be used for tactical blockages. A chair in some uncertain way is also *like* a body. And in Augusto Boal’s “Theater of the Oppressed”—an expansion of the *media* of Paulo Freire’s Pedagogy of the Oppressed, oriented around improvisational drama rather than an emphasis on critical literacy—we find a kind of warm up game in which reconfiguring a group of chairs is used as a way of seeing power relations.<sup>322</sup> The chair as a kind of positional place holder of abstract power. But this symbolic reorientation suggests a more material ambiguity of chairs, as for example an airplane seat, in the event of an emergency, *becomes* a floatation device. Chairs may float, but when used as an obstruction or barricade it can also raise the water level, flooding the corridors of a labyrinth, allowing the terrain to be reworked on the fly.

The second, related lesson comes to us, perhaps inadvertently, from the librarians. And that is that books, stacked closed and unread, make excellent insulating walls, or impromptu labyrinths.—or chairs. Libraries are, of course, the great example of the Inside-out Decorated Shed, displaying the symbolic wealth of knowledge on their interior surfaces. As the stacks and the warehousing function of libraries recede, the inner labyrinth comes to the surface as a

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<sup>322</sup> Augusto Boal, *Games for actors and non-actors* (New York: Routledge, 2002).

display. Of what? The act of reading, perhaps, but also the collaborative juxtaposition of books, their tendency to form aggregates and strata, but also no doubt a kind of symbolic accumulated wealth of knowledge, a kind of literal and literary tower of wisdom—a kind of involuted and dense bulletin board, books stacked cover to cover, represent the ability of paper to become structural simply by folding back on itself, as if reflecting on itself. Of course, this is not restricted to books; the news media itself has long considered its own proliferation. The wall of TV's is a constant trope, as is the image of the newsroom in the background: the news portrays the proliferation of the news. We speak of embedded media, but media itself is embedded, picture in picture. But libraries likewise enact this central ambiguity, the way their symbolic function also speaks to an ever possible phase shift of pulp. We could look, for example, to the seminal Centre Pompidou in Paris, housing the *Bibliothèque publique d'information*, a public library, and the *Musée National d'Art Moderne*. Designed by Richard Rogers, Renzo Piano, et al, it is nothing so much as a building turned inside out, displaying on the outside the duct-work and engineering of the functions of the building itself. A spectacular display of the *mediation* of inside and outside. The duct work, operates to vent the space but it also allows the venting itself to be mediated. One jury praised the Pompidou for, “transforming what had once been elite monuments into popular places of social and cultural exchange, woven into the heart of the city.” But if the function of the guts of the building serves as a kind of monument to function, we can also imagine that the façade of the Pompidou is turned not just inside out, but inward even further, so that it is the books themselves that serve as the bricks of this interior edifice, displayed as the emblem of information.

But again, this is not without its alternative uses. We have already evoked Pierre Bayard's book *How to Talk About Books You Haven't Read*. One of the implications of this is that

refusing-to-read something can serve not just as a way to maintain perspective, but also to free us up to understand the kind of physical excess of possibility that a closed book possesses. As Deleuze points out, within the context of the discipline, the disciplining force, of Philosophy:

The history of philosophy has always been the agent of power in philosophy, and even in thought. It has played the repressor's role: how can you think without having read Plato, Descartes, Kant and Heidegger, and so-and-so's book about them? A formidable school of intimidation which manufactures specialists in thought—but which also makes those who stay outside conform all the more to this specialism which they despise. An image of thought called philosophy has been formed historically and it effectively stops people from thinking.<sup>323</sup>

The challenge then, is not just to stay away from the specialist's content, which is also a kind of conforming, but also to move through books differently. This is thus the second field lesson: closed books are great buffers and opportunities for movement. This is perhaps as close as one can come to a kind of educational heresy, like pointing out the peeling paint. Even when we spruce it up, we tend to take space and setting, in education, as illusory trappings, distractions from the truth. Indeed, the space itself tends towards an indicator of something else. The fire approximates the sun. The architecture of education shares this with the function of cathedrals, an indicator of the beyond. Returning to Levinas for a moment, we could think his notion of height as escaping the very constraints of architectural space itself. Derrida poses the problem:

No matter how high it is, height is always accessible; the most high, however, is higher than height. No addition of more height will ever measure it. It does not belong to space, is not of this world. But what necessity compels this inscription of language in space at the very moment when it exceeds space? And if the pole of metaphysical transcendence is a spatial non-height, what, in the last analysis, legitimates the expression of trans-ascendance?<sup>324</sup>

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<sup>323</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Claire Parnet, *Dialogues* (London: Athlone Press, 1987), 13.

<sup>324</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Writing and difference* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978).

Paying attention to the actual works of education is somewhat akin to looking at the finger pointing at the moon—we are considered fools for looking. But as Derrida notes, there is something of space that plagues this transcendental gesture. Perhaps we can see this not simply as an illegitimate, if necessary, cost or remainder, but a reminder that we need not a mode of correcting for the distractions of setting, but for the illusory notion that it's not about where we are and what we are doing. We continually distract ourselves from seeing our finger by looking at pictures of the moon. This notional practice is one of the primary mechanisms by which we cover over the workings of the moment—and perhaps not without cause, since when we do look directly at many of our educational practices they are so often not so pleasant. If we are to do something about this we need to find opportunities for different responses to the specificity of our places and settings of learning. But more specifically we would be well served by gaining a facility not just with seeing these transitory spaces, but with thinking and responding to them on the fly.

### **How to Slap a Nazi on a Train**

On the fly. But to where? Education today hurtles us through space as if it were a moving train, a labyrinth writ large over the surface of our globalized lives, Ariadne's thread replaced by greased rails. And what we are desperately in need of is a working skill in knowing what to do while we are hurtling through space. Let us come full circle by ending with a joke.

In a symposium talk entitled "The Role of Language in the Perceptual Processes," Alfred Korzybski, the founder of the field of General Semantics—an odd attempt to develop semantics

as a kind of practice of living—pauses to tell a joke.<sup>325</sup> Interestingly, he has just framed this talk as a way of approaching the problem of “perception” indirectly, from a different angle. A straying from the usual route. The joke is an old one, taking many forms, often modified to reflect a local politics—a testament to its formal interest. As Korzybski tells it:

Perhaps a story from the European underground under Hitler would be a good illustration. In a railroad compartment an American grandmother with her young and attractive granddaughter, a Romanian officer, and a Nazi officer were the only occupants. The train was passing through a dark tunnel, and all that was heard was a loud kiss and a vigorous slap. After the train emerged from the tunnel, nobody spoke.

Korzybski will take this as an opportunity to detail the vagaries, the ideology we could say, of perception, steering us wrong. He will go on to illustrate the different perceptions that constitute the punch line of the joke:

The grandmother was saying to herself, “What a fine girl I have raised. She will take care of herself. I am proud of her.” The granddaughter was saying to herself, “Well, grandmother is old enough not to mind a little kiss. Besides, the fellows are nice. I am surprised what a hard wallop grandmother has.” The Nazi officer was meditating, “How clever these Romanians are! They steal a kiss and have the other fellow slapped.” The Romanian officer was chuckling to himself, “How smart I am! I kissed my own hand and slapped the Nazi.”

A train is hurtling through the dark, its scene frozen, unchanged before and after entering the tunnel, an artificial night. What Korzybski seems to be suggesting is that the joke is an illustration of our tendency to make stuff up—a question of interpretation. The joke is on us. The solution from a semantic or education standpoint is caution: don’t jump to conclusions. Restrict yourself to careful correlations to what has transpired. It becomes an edifying moral tale. But what if the point isn’t to catch ourselves being duped, but to imagine ourselves having enough wits about us, so that when the lights go out, we can arrange to slap a Nazi?

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<sup>325</sup> Alfred Korzybski, “The role of language in the perceptual processes,” in *Perception; an approach to personality*, ed. Robert R. Blake and Glenn V. Ramsey (New York,; Ronald Press, 1951).



What is the shortest distance between two walls? In other words, what if the joke isn't about being more accurate, but about being more devious? Of taking advantage of the moment to find a solution to our frustrations and desires? In a way we could say that telling this joke as a tale about perceptual bias is itself a beautiful example of perceptual bias, failing to see the way in which it affords us what seemed unattainable in the light. (Like imagining that the fundamental deception of Odysseus' escape from the Cyclops is semantic, betrays our susceptibility to semantics.)

The more interesting reading would be to suggest that Korzybski has given us a joke that works on this very ambiguity. Seeming to be one thing, it allows for something else. The joke is that we imagine it to teach us about being cautious, masking our pleasure in letting loose and getting away with things—striking range. This is the surprising cleverness of the joke, its twist. We think the dirty action, the transgression is in stealing a kiss, taking advantage. And it is true, it is a story about power, about something quick and dirty. But it turns out it is politics, not sex. This is the apparently hard choice the Romanian makes with ease, to prefer revenge over desire. And finding it easier than he should is the very cover for the action. Seen in this dark light, what does this joke have still to surprise us with? What can it teach us about education? For that, we would need to take the trappings seriously. As much as the joke will be rewritten and repopulated, the specificity matters. Who slaps who? Age matters, gender matters, politics matters. The pretense that is being busted is the etiquette of pretending otherwise, that we are all just the same. The fact that it is a train, carrying all of these passengers, together, in a specific static configuration down a predefined course thus matters. Sometime a train is precisely a train. And what the joke asks us to realize is that we are always busy dealing with a situation: the teaming movement beneath the surface, like the churning

pistons under the fixed accommodations of the car. We are always Romanians sitting with an object of desire, while next to a Nazi, stuck in our places—and then the lights go out. It shows us that the shortest distance to some new place often involves working under the surface, that *other* ceiling, leaving everyone in their place, but slipping in another dimension, a sleight of hand coupled with a sleight of lips, that introduces something unexpected into the mix. The cave is not an impoverished desert, it is an echo chamber, a spring, that in reducing one dimension adds another. Above all it allows us to move differently than we might have imagined. If the light pins us, kissing our own hand in the dark frees that hand from its constraint. Plato was right, hands in the dark are wicked. But isn't morality itself set loose, blurring the boundary between the frozen violence of Nazi intimidation and the constraints of etiquette? The lesson is that the situation itself is already twisted, complicated, interpolated across multiple bodies, and that the solution is not to reduce the situation to a simple gesture, but by finding a simple way to complicate it, to move differently in relationship to our situation.

Another way to put this is that darkness is always articulated, articulating. Just because it's dark doesn't mean you can't slap a Nazi—all the easier. But to see this we have to willing to see the usual distinction that this joke highlights—between the act and the interpretation—as the cover for an ongoing movement that can allow something to become expressed. In this context the train is both the constraint and the opportunity. This place, as Derrida said of the educational, is not indifferent—which is to say that not only are we not indifferent about it, but the place itself is articulating. What then constitutes effective movement, in relationship to a not indifferent place? The larger context of the joke, the European Underground under Hitler's occupation, should remind us that we are always trying to sort out our actions under a

kind of intense pressure, regardless of any calm on the surface. This continually unfolding and folding movement makes it difficult to navigate the tension between inaction and action. How are we to think, we should not forget to ask, this slapping of a Nazi? As a kind of small and delicious heroism? As a petty dream? Or as a complicity in the semblance of order, simply stealing satisfactions on the sly, while we are all left to think whatever stories we will about what has unfolded? The more difficult question is whether anything at all has happened, and how we could tell.

Can we recall Coney Island? This way in which things reset is in no simple way the *other* of the Catastrophe. How even the line between staged and real catastrophe and reset becomes difficult to discern. It is as if, in this joke, the sense of the outcome—the result of finding this freedom of moving counter to inertia—is suspended. The Romanian's reward is to both act and to revel privately in his act. Or is it his punishment, his sacrifice—for this gesture he must now sit still, as if nothing happened? We might think of the myth of Sisyphus. King Sisyphus' problems started with the hubris of thinking he was more clever than Zeus. But more clever how? His deceit was in escaping the underworld, moving up and down almost at will, feeling free to report on the indiscretions of the gods. His crime was not in striving for the top, but in showing the striving to be empty, easily played. His punishment was to roll the rock up hill each day only to see it roll to the bottom again. The punishment fits the crime. This is its mythic sense. Everything comes full circle.

What is of interest is the peculiar power of this ongoing story of education that we have in some uncertain way been following to both shock and seem routine. On the one hand we demand of education that it bring about the new, arriving with a shout. On the other hand, we ask that it be recognizable and repeatable: a routine, if slightly odd, birth. Constantly trying to

break free—to recover the essential, transformative character of learning—we tell the story again and afresh. And yet, the very repetition pulls us back into the mire of routine. The shock of birth becomes the repetition of labor. The birth of Athena transmutes into the work of Sisyphus, rolling his rock uphill anew each day. In this strange repetition of progress the only way to maintain the dramatic tension is to continue to escalate the stakes. (High-stakes testing is only the most obvious recent manifestation.)

The story of education is thus paradoxically also—or essentially—a story of resistance to thought and progress. The louder we insist on the need for educational value, the more we evoke its real or potential failure. Even the more politically conservative and aloof Aristotle, apparently separating himself from Plato's educational battle with the ignorant, will set in line a notion of education and contemplation as good-in-and-of-themselves by showing the work necessary to bring this about: the incessant caution (and luck) needed to navigate any number of distinct Scylla and Charybdis. This tension at the heart of the matter is not simply a sign of the difficulty of finally bringing about new possibilities. Rather, the need for dramatic tension in this perennial story is the engine by which it replicates itself; and its apparent progressivism disguises an equally strong conservatism maintenance, even insistence upon, the very conditions it deplures.

The story works by not working, gathering force by its repetition of imagery, finally abstracted from everything but its own spatiality, which is then imposed everywhere. The first act of No Child Left Behind was, by narrative necessity, to quite literally leave children behind.<sup>326</sup> The only work was to show that this delay had already been the case. To argue the

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<sup>326</sup> See, for example, Monica Davey, "A Child Held Behind," *The New York Times*, January 16, 2005 2005. "At the moment, retention is rising in popularity nationally, in the wake of Chicago's example and in

details was to reinforce the inevitability of the spatial logic. And who amongst us was going to argue that we weren't behind, late for our own education? Athena must be born. Rather than being just one more example of political obliviousness, it is important to note the consistency of this urban gesture, placing it in a long line with the likes of the clear threat to the urban population and to social cohesion presented by the industrial revolution. Education was clearly the answer, and yet, it is precisely to the factory that education turns when confronted with the challenge of systematizing its processes and meeting the urban threat. How can one learn to leave unless one has a factory/cave/classroom with which to ritually practice?

But does posing it thus answer the question? If it is merely a self-fulfilling prophesy, why is it that the very programs that intend to save the city replicate the very models that appear to threaten it? We shape our world to *make* sense to us. We *get* lost in ways that are familiar to us, that reset the scene. Are we like Sisyphus: clever enough not to be dictated to by our chains, but not so clever that we can figure out anything else to do with our freedom? Up and down we have the narrative go. As Camus would have it, the task of Sisyphus is absurd and yet pleasurable: "The struggle itself...is enough to fill a man's heart. One must imagine Sisyphus happy."<sup>327</sup> If so, don't we also have to imagine that in some unclear way Sisyphus stands not as the figure either of perpetual toil, or too free movement, finding ways to slap the Gods, but as the uncertain moment between them. Not the way in which day flips into night, or a shell spins around its virtual axis. But the way in which things twist, get twisted, are lost to us.

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the climate of school accountability championed by the Bush administration's No Child Left Behind law. As a centerpiece of his education policy, Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg of New York City initiated a retention effort last year, as have a range of other municipalities and some entire states."

<sup>327</sup> Albert Camus, *The myth of Sisyphus and other essays* (New York: Vintage Books, 1991).

Education, this path of forgetting. This path that we forget we have walked before. This path that forgets we have passed.

*The kindness of exalted Night is wonderful, and no one  
Knows where she comes from, or what will emerge from her.  
Thus she moves the world, and the hopeful minds of humans:  
Not even a sage knows what she's up to.  
The highest god, who loves you very much, wants it so;  
Therefore you prefer reasonable day to the night.  
But occasionally a clear eye loves the shadows as well,  
And tries to sleep just for pleasure, before it's necessary,*

—Friedrich Hölderlin, “Bread and Wine”<sup>328</sup>

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<sup>328</sup> Friedrich Hölderlin, *Hyperion and selected poems*, The German library (New York: Continuum, 1990).

## Postface

There is a phrase of Deleuze and Guattari's that keeps repeating in my head. If I recall, they were writing about Leibniz and the organic. The phrase goes something like, "It's not that everything is a fish; it's that fish are everywhere." To track it down would defeat the purpose, because what it lends to mind is the teeming variations, the bounty of life, all of the lines not taken, or taken without being named. You can name a fish, of course, but in doing so you jest at least a little. Schools of fish laugh at the singular, shimmering out of reach of a diver's hand, out of his or her element. It's not at all haphazard, this movement, it just can't be planned in advance, and it lends itself to the evasion of capture.

Looking for the repetitions of a narrative line of education, I stumbled one day onto cities. They shimmered everywhere, there all along in the reeds and murky waters. And a bit like a paranoid it began to seem to me like everything might be a city. Not just a city, but a whole ritualized mythology around the cycling through of divided cities—for every city a sacrifice—everywhere you looked. Why did we not notice? Is this not the paranoid's question though? Better to take the route of the schizophrenic, to see that fish are simply everywhere. Better to be a school of fish. Evade capture. Shimmer.

Cities today are more and more like schools of fish, neither high nor low, here nor there, but everywhere, nowhere. "Occupy everything" I saw scrawled on a men's room wall the other day. A *reductio ad absurdum*, I thought. One more excess. But it expresses the new logic of

cities, of education, of movement. As if the strange, *a-topos*, vision of educational utopia had arrived, and rather than notice, we kept striving for it. As if it was not all we imagined. A convenience for tying up the milk. The old modes of cities have not gone away, if anything they are all the more entrenched. Our institutions of education both material and habitual (and how does one live without the other) are going nowhere soon. They play at being fishlike, but only managed to be fish farms, and as even this proves unsustainable are more and more like sweeping nets, trying to coral and manage the elusive. And so this odd game, of fish and nets. It is less and less a matter of what we know, of what we can think about education. More and more it's about how we move. In and out of nets.

But there is a danger even in that. Just as we learned to sit in chairs and regulate time, just as we learned the infinitesimal movements and repetitions of stillness, we now run the risk of dispersal. So good at moving through filters and nets, we are reduced to the moves of suspended particulates. This is no doubt partly the source of the lament that student's these days do school like consumers: expect certain grades, treat teachers like servers, act like they've bought certain rights... But the complaint itself is retrograde, indicating a mere preference for the older disciplinary moves and dreams.<sup>329</sup> The two, however are never mutually excluded. We never even had to get out of our chairs—which always served as filters anyway, even in the heyday of discipline, both open and closed, shaping and indifferent. The

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<sup>329</sup> "Control societies are taking over from disciplinary societies. 'Control' is the name proposed by Burroughs to characterize the new monster, and Foucault sees it fast approaching. Paul Virilio too is constantly analyzing the ultrarapid forms of apparently free floating control that are taking over from the old disciplines at work within the time scales of closed systems [...] It's not a question of asking whether the old or new system is harsher or more bearable, because there's a conflict in each between the ways they free and enslave us." And: "Confinements are molds, different moldings, while controls are a modulation, like a self-transmutating molding continually changing from one moment to the next, or like a sieve whose mesh varies from one point to another." Gilles Deleuze, "Postscript on the Societies of Control," *October* 59(1992).



danger is that we will simply adjust, become more agile, update our resumes, mobile but without a sense of traction. Postmodernism's endless moves....

McKenzie Wark, author of *The Beach Beneath the Street*, a history of the Situationist International, argues for what he calls “low theory,”—more a *practice*, taking up the Situationists urban movement and engagement—“a critical thought indifferent to the institutional forms of the academy or the art world.”<sup>330</sup> Can we simply slip past, or under? Perhaps. But is the threat not that this is still one more of an endless series of inversions: *what if theory itself were low, went slumming?* What if this was always the strange call of theory? We should recall the early practice of the *theroi*, leaving their native city. More difficult to think is this *indifference* to institutional forms.<sup>331</sup> What if it is not so much that in being indifferent we elude capture finding room for a critical practice grounded in creating differentials within the urban, but rather that indifference is itself a result of the moves we make? “Practiced indifference,” we say. But does this not indicate the tension at the heart of the matter: that indifference is both a gesture and in relation to something that *is not indifferent* for us? Movement is not what we do once we resolve this, find our place. Movement is the feeling out, neither simply active nor passive, of possibilities around something that is at stake, that makes a difference. Can we learn this?

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<sup>330</sup> McKenzie Wark, *The beach beneath the street: the everyday life and glorious times of the Situationist International* (New York: Verso, 2011).

<sup>331</sup> In particular, we always run the risk, if not the certainty, in these circumstances of a kind of feigned indifference: a sign of one's assured formal position. For example, a dominant primate will often face off, forcing another to turn and run, presenting their back. But will also turn their own back as a sign of dominance, indicating that the other would not dare attack. See, Maxine Sheets-Johnstone, *The roots of power: animate form and gendered bodies* (Chicago: Open Court, 1994). This is also why we should be suspicious of the argument against the comodification of education, passed along since Socrates' critique of the Sophists. It easily masks as many bonds as it unveils.

*In the end—this strange caesura before the beginning—I risk a glance back, postface, realizing that it was never about making the case, attempting to show others, like a paranoiac, what seems self-evident. Instead what I am discovering is that the more it is allowed to be what it is, the more things shimmer. Not everything is a fish. Fish are everywhere.*

*Here, suspended in the moment, we could repeat after Socrates, while leaving the resonance open, “They’re like us.”*

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